

Man's Lust for Power, and the Power of God's Word

Acts 8:14-25, Pentecost Sunday

May 27, 2007

Beloved of the Lord.....Since the beginning of time, there has been a constant struggle for power among men. Men by nature desire to rule over one another, and they will rule by force. Unbelieving Cain wanted power over his believing brother Abel, and so he took the life of his own brother by force, by power. Likewise the Old Testament is filled with examples of wicked kings and rulers who by force persecuted and killed the prophets that God had sent. In Matthew 23, Jesus said to the unbelieving Pharisees "Behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and *some* of them ye shall kill and crucify; and *some* of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute *them* from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar....." From these words of Jesus we see that wherever the truth of God's Word is taught, the world will attempt to silence the truth by power and force.

Yet we of the Christian Church are not to use force nor power to win others over for the truth. The New Testament Church uses the power of God's Word alone, the Sword of the Spirit. This spiritual sword which conquers our enemies is a two-edged sword. First we preach the law, which cuts to the heart and the soul of the sinner. The law reveals and lays bare the sins of men so that men repent of their wickedness and not perish in hell. The other side of the two-edged sword is the Gospel. We preach the Gospel that those who see their own wounds of sin may be healed. The Gospel heals the wounds of the penitent sinner, through the blood of Jesus Christ. When we of the New Testament Church use God's Word faithfully, we can be confident that the Lord will produce the fruits. For God says, "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." Is. 55 This is God's promise to those us, that when we speak His Word to others, there will be fruit. We must trust that God through His Word will do what He pleases. In this world, Christians sow the seed of God's Word, but God gives the increase. God converts and saves souls through the Word.

I. Man's lust for power. No where is this more evident than at the time of Pentecost when God poured out His Spirit upon the disciples, and they were given supernatural gifts of preaching the Word in a foreign language and also given the gift of healing. By the

power of God's Word, the early Christian Church grew in leaps and bounds. Yet wherever God's Word was taught, there was opposition. By power and force, the unbelieving Jews began persecuting the believers, who were then scattered throughout the region. One of these regions where the Word of God went was Samaria. The Bible says, "Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did." Acts 8 Miracles of healing helped to confirm the truth that Philip was sent by God. "When they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women." By the grace of God, many were joyfully converted to the Christian faith. They believed as we believe, that Christ is our Savior from sin! Among these Samaritans there was an evil sorcerer named Simon. He would use Satanic power to perform miracles before the eyes of the people. Moreover Simon, by these false miracles, held a great power among the people. They all followed Simon as if he were sent from God. We should note here that Satan often deceives people with signs and lying wonders. There are many false prophets today who perform what seem to be genuine miracles, but they are either con-artists or they work by the devil's power and we ought not believe them. When people do "miracles" in our day, we should never just follow them and assume they are from God. For God warns us, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." I Jn. 4 If the message they preach does not agree with our catechism and Bible, God did not send them.

But returning now to Simon, even though Simon had led a wicked and even Satanic life, God through the power of His Word converted Simon! Just think how powerful God's Word must be, that even sorcerers can be converted! "Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done." Oh how we should glorify God for the strength and power of His Word to convert even the most ungodly of men! Truly Simon for a short time believed and was a true follower of God. But Simon had a problem. In Simon's sinful heart there was still a lust for his former power among the people. This is a warning to all Christians. For even though Christ lives in our hearts by faith, in our own flesh there still lives a lust for power. Man by nature seeks to rule over his neighbor! Instead of trusting and letting God guide and rule our lives by His Word, we by nature want all power and control for ourselves.

Now when Peter and John came up to Samaria, they laid their hands on the Samaritans, and suddenly the

Holy Ghost gave them supernatural gifts! Some Samaritans were given the temporary but supernatural gifts of healing or speaking in a foreign language. When Simon saw this gift given to others and not himself, he became jealous. To the apostles he offered money "saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost." In a moment, in an instant, due to his lust for power, Simon fell away from faith. He coveted a spiritual office, thinking it could be purchased by money. Luther writes, "This is simony....if one buys or sells a spiritual office, possession, gift, or power for money, as 'Simon Magus did.'" In time of temptation, due to his lust for power, Simon reverted back to his old and sinful life. He fell from the grace of God, having loved this present world, more than Christ.

II. The power of God's Word. When Peter heard this terrible lust for power from Simon's lips, Peter sternly rebuked Simon. "Thy money perish with thee! because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God!" Peter is saying "Your money will perish with you in hell Simon, for thinking that the gifts of God can be purchased with filthy lucre!" What a blasphemous thought that was of Simon! Peter then says, "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee." Peter is saying, "Simon, if you don't want to perish, repent before God punishes you! Pray to God that He will forgive those wicked thoughts of your heart!" A total change of heart was now required if Simon was to be saved! His lust for power on earth must be utterly rejected and he must instead seek God's forgiveness, yielding to God's power! There is no mercy nor grace in Peter's words. He does not mix nor confuse the law and the Gospel. If Simon is to be saved from his lust for power, the pride of his heart must be totally broken.

Simon now answers, "Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me." We notice that Simon feared the consequence of his sins, but he did not repent. While he fears what may happen to him because of his sin, there is no real change of heart, no sincere repentance. Simon does not tremble and shake and say, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" Nor does he confess like David "I have sinned against the Lord." From this point on the Bible says nothing of Simon.

If we are to be instrumental in leading others to Christ, we must first lead them to the knowledge of sin. And the Bible says, "by the law is the knowledge of sin." A soul that is not hungry for forgiveness cannot receive forgiveness nor Christ by faith into the heart. Therefore if we love our neighbor, we must use the Sword of the

Spirit, the Word of God rightly, faithfully. For we either lead them to heaven or hell, by what we say or don't say. There will be times when we must be like Peter, and preach the law with all its threats and demands. There will also be times when we must preach the Gospel in all the sweetness that the troubled and wounded soul might be healed by the grace of God given joyfully through Jesus Christ! If we use God's Word faithfully, we can take comfort that God's Word will bear fruit. "So shall My Word be that goeth forth out of my mouth, it shall not return unto Me void", God says. That is God's promise to us, if we but speak His Word faithfully. Take comfort in the knowledge also, that the Holy Ghost will help you to say what you ought.

In our last verse for this morning, of Peter and John the Bible says, "And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans." Regardless of Simon, they moved on and continued to preach and teach God's Word faithfully. They trusted as we should, that God's Word has power. They sowed the seed, but God gave the increase. It is as Paul writes, "Neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." I Cor. 3:7 We trust that the Holy Ghost through the Word will bear the fruit.

Brethren, as we close this morning, let us never forget that God's Word has power. While we are to use the law when appropriate, our main goal and desire is to preach the Gospel to every creature. The law can save no one, but only prepare one to be saved. Our true joy, the true joy of every Christian is always in the Gospel message of Jesus Christ our Savior. We go forward, we take each step every day in the knowledge that we are redeemed and forgiven creatures, cleansed and sanctified and made holy in the blood of the Lamb! We rejoice in the words of Jesus our Savior who said, "Whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." If we then believe that He is our life and our salvation, we have nothing to fear! Everlasting life awaits you dear child of God, above in heaven. Therefore put all your strength and confidence in Him, for He cannot and will not fail you. The Lord Jesus Christ warmly invites you to heaven with His Gospel invitation. For "the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Rev. 22 Amen.