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Transcribed from the [1877] Hatchards edition by David Price, email ccx074@pglaf.org

### A Sermon PREACHED IN YORK MINSTER,

#### ON

# *St. Bartholomew's Day, Friday, August* 24, 1877,

ON THE OCCASION OF THE CONSECRATION OF **THE RIGHT REV. ROWLEY HILL**, LORD BISHOP OF SODOR AND MAN.

> BY THE REV. CANON HOARE, VICAR OF TRINITY, TUNBRIDGE WELLS.

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### PREFACE.

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The Consecration of the Bishop of Sodor and Man will long be remembered, both at York and Sheffield; for no one can have been present on that occasion without having been profoundly impressed by the sight of the overwhelming congregation, and the many tokens of deep interest manifestly taken in the service. So many of the Sheffield people desired to be present that two special trains were prepared for their accommodation, by which there arrived no less than seven hundred persons. The Dean having heard that they were coming did all in his power to give them a welcome. The whole space in front of the Communion-rail was filled with seats, and in the admission of the crowds who were pressing into the Cathedral precedence was given to the visitors from Sheffield. But, notwithstanding all the efforts of the Cathedral authorities, I am sorry to say that a great many failed to get in. Before the Sermon I sat in the stalls, and to avoid the crowd in the choir I was conducted into the nave, and so outside the choir to the pulpit. In the course of that walk I saw hundreds who were unable to obtain admission. Some were standing in the nave, and others straining to see and hear through the glass screen by the side of the choir. When the door was opened to let me in I cannot say how I longed to take them all in with me. But that was impossible. The whole place was packed, and every available standing-ground in the neighbourhood of the pulpit was full.

Nor was it a mere sight-seeing crowd. I found myself surrounded by people who were manifestly there for higher ends, and who listened with as fixed an attention as any preacher could desire. But the most remarkable part of the service was the Holy Communion, with which it closed. At the end of the Prayer for the Church Militant there was a pause, in order that those who did not intend to remain for the Lord's Supper might retire; but of the great crowd near the rail very few went away. At first it seemed a doubtful question whether they understood that the time was come for them to go; but it soon became evident that they perfectly understood what they were doing, and that they were remaining to partake of the Lord's Supper. The bread and wine originally prepared was quite insufficient for such a number of communicants, and it was necessary to send out for an additional supply. When once the service began everything was done that could be done for the comfort of all that were present; but as the whole space in front of the rail was filled with seats, all of which were occupied, and there was only one narrow passage by which the communicants could both approach and retire, and as there were eight persons administering, it was impossible to secure that solemn stillness which we sometimes enjoy in our parochial churches. But nothing could possibly be more interesting. There I saw not only ladies and gentlemen, but many who appeared to me to be mechanics, and, scattered through the crowd, numbers of young men.

When I looked on that mixed body of communicants, and observed the earnestness, the seriousness, and the apparently deep devotion with which they gathered round the Table of their Lord; and when after the service was over I saw them pressing round their beloved Vicar, and many of them reaching out their rough hands once more to grasp his with a true, hearty, loving grasp, and heard them wishing him a blessing, I could not help giving thanks to the God of all grace who gave that day such a testimony to the faithful reaching of His Gospel. For what were the means employed for the attainment of such a result? Not music, not form, not the claim to priestly power, but the plain, simple, loving ministry of the Gospel of the grace of God. Between three and four years my dear friend had been preaching the great doctrines of Scripture—such as conversion to God, justification by faith, free forgiveness through the finished atonement, and, new life by the power of the Holy Ghost—and God had blessed that ministry to the ingathering of a people to His name. This was the work of which we that day witnessed the fruit, and I trust the effects on all of us who witnessed it may be that we may work on in our various spheres of labour more than ever resolved, by God's help, to stick fast to great principles, and more than ever encouraged to trust His promises, and look out for great results.

Tunbridge Wells, August 29th, 1877.

A SERMON.

'Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto Me.'—Acts, i. 8.

It is said of the saints of God in the Old Testament, that 'out of weakness they were made strong,' and none of us who are called to God's ministry can think for one moment of our work and our weakness without the deepest sense of our own need of that same gift. We have a work of infinite importance. We are called to be God's instruments in making known that which God has wrought at no less a price than the most precious blood of His well-beloved Son. We have to encounter the threefold antagonism of the world, the flesh, and the devil; and we ourselves are poor weak creatures, so weak that we are quite unable to stand alone, and so utterly fallen that we cannot preserve ourselves even for an hour. It follows, therefore, that we all stand in need of power from God. And whatever be our position, whether in the ministry or out of it, whether laymen, deacons, presbyters, or bishops, we all require to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man. If ever the need of this strength was felt it must be felt now, now that we are passing through the perilous times of the latter days; and if there be any office in the whole world which appears to require it more than another, it is the sacred office to which my dear friend is this day admitted, the holy office of a Bishop in the Church of God.

But, thanks to God! there is provision made in the Gospel for weakness as well as for sin; and the result is, that the promise of power was almost the last promise made by our blessed Lord before He left us, so that just before His ascension He said, 'Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto Me.' Now the Holy Ghost came on the

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Church at Pentecost, and as there has never been said one word about His being withdrawn, we are warranted in looking for that power now, and in spreading out our weakness before His throne, in full assurance that according to His promise He Himself will give power for His work. Let us study, then, two points—1st, the purpose, and 2ndly, the source of the power; and while we study, may we by God's great grace be permitted to experience the gift!

I. The purpose: 'Ye shall be witnesses unto Me.' It in clear, therefore, that the power is a power of testimony, and that its great object is to enable us to be witnesses unto the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are not, therefore, *judges*. The witness is never the judge. His business is to bear testimony as to what he has seen and heard. But he has nothing to do with the sentence. That rests with the judge alone. So the witness for Christ is not the judge over his follow-men. He cannot sit in the Confessional and pronounce the sentence of life and death. That rests with the Lord Himself, and there must be no usurpation of His sovereign right.

Then, again, the witness is not a *medium*, or connecting link, between the soul and the Saviour. He is not like a telegraph wire through which the electric current is conveyed from one point to another, for in God's salvation there is nothing intermediate between the Saviour and the sinner. There is no such thing in Scripture as the idea that the grace of God passes from the Lord Jesus through any men or body of men to the sinner. All that is human imagination, pure and simple. The witness is not a conductor or communicator, not a channel or a medium. His business is to bear such a testimony to the Lord Jesus Christ as shall bring the soul face to face with Him, and introduce the sinner into direct communication with God Himself.

Thus it is that he is a witness unto the Lord Jesus Christ, and the more plainly that he sets Him before the people the more effective is his testimony. If we wish to know the leading subject of the witness we shall find it in Luke, xxiv. In the forty-eighth verse of that chapter He told His little Church, as He did in this chapter of the Acts, that their office was to be witnesses: 'Ye are witnesses of these things.' But we may ask, What things? What were those things to which the Church were to be witnesses? The previous verse answers the question: 'That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations.' Mark, it says 'preached,' not communicated; but in His name it is to be preached fully and freely. Forgiveness through the finished atonement is the leading subject of the testimony. It is the office of the witness to proclaim the great work which the Lord Jesus Christ has completed for the propitiation of sin, and to invite men to the free and full reconciliation which He has promised as the result of that propitiation. We are to proclaim from His own word what He is, what He has done, what He has promised, and what He is doing. We are to set Him so clearly, so vividly, before the people, that they may see nothing of us, but look fixedly on Him. We are to bear such a testimony to His work, His word, His mercy, His grace, His all-sufficiency, that those who know Him not may have their hearts burn to know Him; that those who are longing after Him may find Him, and have their souls satisfied in His love; and that those who know Him may be led to such a personal experience of the unspeakable richness of His abounding mercies that they may be able to say to us, as her friends did to the woman of Samaria, 'Now we believe; not because of thy saying: for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.' The best possible result of the testimony of the Christian witness is, that those who receive it should be brought into such an independent relationship with the Lord Himself that the witness who has brought them to it disappears before the fulness of His grace. And the very last thing that such a witness would ever desire is, that people should come to him as an intermediate mediator between them and their Saviour. The one object of his life and testimony is that all eyes, and all thoughts, and all hearts, should be directed exclusively to the Lord Jesus; and if that blessed end can be accomplished, the true witness is only too happy and thankful to be himself quite out of sight.

II. But in order to this testimony there is power required. There are cases in which the testimony involves nothing short of martyrdom, as it did in the case of the first martyr, or witness, Stephen; as it did when the Huguenots were martyred for the faith on St. Bartholomew's Day, three centuries ago; and as lately done in our mission stations in West Africa and in China. But in all cases the strongest amongst us must remember St. Paul's words, descriptive of his ministry at Corinth: 'I was with you in weakness and in fear, and in much trembling.' We all want a power far beyond anything that we can discover in our own hearts. This, then, leads me to our second subject, the source of the power.

One thing is perfectly plain, viz. that the power does not come from arbitrary assumption, and high sacerdotal claims to something amounting to superhuman authority; to such claims as those put forward when the Bishop's authority is contrasted with that which is 'merely human,' and the Bishop's voice is declared to be to the clergyman 'the voice of God.' Such assumptions being without the slightest shadow of scriptural authority are sure, in the long run, only to weaken power.

Nor does the power here promised arise from even the legitimate exercise of well-established law. In the Church of England, I am thankful to say, we are both protected and restrained by law; and the Bishop in the Church of England is armed with certain legal powers, which are of the utmost possible importance to the discipline and well-being of our Body. The only people who complain of the power of law are those who wish to break it. But this is not the power described in the text. The power here promised is something which no law can either give or take away. It is the direct gift of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself; it is nothing less than the power of the Holy Ghost.

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In this gift there is accompanying power, a power which it is difficult to describe, but impossible to doubt. It is not the power of intellect or eloquence, for it is bestowed sometimes on persons that have neither one nor the other: but it is a power that cannot be mistaken; for it softens hard hearts, breaks down the most stubborn wills, and subdues those who have been previously opponents to truth. It was such a power that accompanied the preaching St. Paul at Thessalonica, of which he said, 'Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance' (1 Thess. i. 5). But if there be such a power, both promised and bestowed, shall any of us be satisfied without the enjoyment of it? Shall we be content with powerless work? Shall we think it enough if our ministry is respectable and orthodox, our churches well attended, and our parochial arrangements complete, while there is no deep impression on the souls of men, no conviction of sin, no earnest inquiry, no conversions to God, no evidence of a new life, and no sign of the mighty power of the Spirit? Shall we be satisfied to live on, and to work on, just as we should be living and working if the Lord had never said, 'Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you?'

There is also indwelling power. We must not look merely at that which accompanies, for the secret of power is in most cases to be found within. We have a remarkable illustration of this in the case of Stephen. He was accompanied with power, for 'they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.' But the mystery was explained in the secret of his own soul, for in v. 8 of that same chapter we read that he was a man 'full of faith and power.' There was, therefore, a fulness of power within as well as the accompanying power without, and the secret of this fulness is explained in v. 5, where it is said he was a man 'full of faith and of the Holy Ghost.' Here, then, was the key to that marvellous and irresistible power which accompanied his work. He himself was full of faith, and being full of faith, he was full of the Holy Ghost. He was full of faith, so that he could, as it were, see his Lord at his right hand, and 'endure as seeing Him who is invisible.' And he was full of the Holy Ghost, so that he was lifted up above mere human nature. He was taught by the Holy Ghost; he was led by the Holy Ghost; his thoughts were prompted by the Holy Ghost; his wisdom was the wisdom of the Holy Ghost; his words were the words of the Holy Ghost; his mind was governed by the mind of the Holy Ghost; and so he was full of power, for the simple reason that he was 'full of faith and of the Holy Ghost.' Thus the outward and the inward were at one. In his outward activity he was accompanied by the Holy Ghost; in his inward life he was full of the Holy Ghost; and in both one and the other he experienced the truth of the promise, 'Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto Me.'

And why should not we be enjoying the same? Why should not the same power be given to our brother, this day raised to the episcopate, as was given to Stephen when he laboured 1800 years ago in the diaconate? Of one thing I am perfectly sure, and that is, that it is the one desire of his heart to be the faithful witness to the Lord Jesus; to bear the same testimony as a Bishop which he has been enabled to bear as a Presbyter; to speak from his episcopal chair with the same clear ring of Scriptural truth as he has hitherto done from his parochial pulpit, and which has so greatly endeared him to all of you who are come this day from Sheffield. And our prayer for him this day must be that he may be, in his new office, like Stephen, 'full of faith and power,' that so his ministry may be accompanied by the power of the Holy Ghost, and his own soul filled by the Spirit.

But while we pray for him in the high and conspicuous office of a Bishop, let us not be unmindful of all those faithful men who, hidden from the eye of the world, and without any prospects of the honours of the world, are toiling on, some in quiet country parishes, some in the densely-peopled districts of our large towns, and some in far-distant missions, in patient perseverance witnessing for Christ. When our thoughts are directed to those who by the providence of God are brought to the top, let us not forget those who are patiently toiling at the bottom. Do not they equally need the power? Or, rather, Do not they especially need the presence of the indwelling Spirit in their own souls, and of the accompanying Spirit to give the power of patient perseverance in their work? O that God may grant that power to every branch of the Church of England! Power to her bishops, power to her presbyters, power to her deacons, power to her laity! May He grant such a measure of His Spirit to fill all our hearts, and accompany all our work, that our dear old Church may remain, true to her Reformation principles,—a faithful witness for Christ; that her testimony may never be corrupted, and her work never be powerless; that so when the Lord appears He may find her with her lamp burning, without reserve, and without compromise, maintaining His truth and giving glory to His name!

London; Printed by JOHN STRANGEWAYS, Castle St. Leicester

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