

Power

by W.H. Griffith Thomas

The sermon emphasizes the importance of living a life of holiness, characterized by safety, sanctity, and sufficiency, and the secret to possessing our spiritual possessions is faith.

Scripture: Obadiah 1:17

Topics: "Spiritual Power", "Holiness"

Description

W.H. Griffith Thomas preaches on the importance of learning spiritual lessons from the history of Israel, cautioning against misinterpreting promises meant for Israel as directly applicable to the Church. He delves into the Old Testament prophecy in Obadiah, highlighting the secrets of power for holiness found in safety, sanctity, and sufficiency. Thomas emphasizes the need for believers to possess their spiritual possessions in Christ, including safety from sin's penalty, sanctification, and the sufficiency of all spiritual blessings.

Transcript

St. Paul tells us that the things which happened to Israel happened unto them for ensamples or types, and that the record was given for our admonition (1 Cor. 10:11). We are therefore justified in utilizing the history of Israel for spiritual purposes today. One important caution is necessary. We must bear in mind that whenever there are promises of future glory to Israel in the Old Testament, our use of those promises is spiritual and secondary, by way of application, and is not historical and primary, by way of interpretation.

If we are not careful in this matter, we shall incur the somewhat cynical and yet true condemnation of those who take all the blessings to themselves and leave the curses to the Jews! The headings of our Authorized Version, page and chapter, in Isaiah, have much to answer for in this respect, because they take the promises to Israel and apply them to the Church, with which primarily they have nothing whatever to do. But when we keep this truth clearly and constantly in mind, there is no reason why we should not use Old Testament passages with reference to our life today.

With this in view we may look at an Old Testament prophecy in Obadiah to learn from it the secrets of power for holiness: "Upon Mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness: and the House of Jacob shall possess their possessions" (Obad. 17). This prophecy seems to indicate some of the vital and fundamental realities associated with the Christian life. Israel is depicted as redeemed, restored to their former glory, after bondage to their terrible enemy, Edom. They are told that there will come a day when there shall be deliverance from their foe, a fresh consecration to God, and a recovery of all their

possessions, as in the former time.

What do we understand by the Christian life? What are those blessings of which the Old and New Testaments are full? I. The first element is safety. "In Mount Zion there shall be deliverance." In the Revised Version it is "those that escape." This is the foundation of everything - safety. The Gospel starts here. The great New Testament word "salvation" means nothing more and nothing less, in the first place, than safety, deliverance, escape from the penalty of sin. This is the first step into the Christian life; and it is well for us to ask this question, "Have I taken it?"

It is not altogether inaccurate to say that from time to time people have the second step in mind rather than the first. Yet we know it is utterly impossible to take a second step before we have taken the first, and holiness, a truer and purer and nobler life, is utterly impossible until and unless we have settled this first question - escape, deliverance, safety, from the penalty of sin. Sometimes we speak of this theologically as Justification. The word matters not; what is essential is the reality, the experience.

So there comes to every one of us this question, "Am I safe? Am I delivered from the penalty of sin?" To which the true reply is, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." It need hardly be said that the way of deliverance is the way of faith, the acceptance of Him who died that we might live, who by His death became our righteousness, "that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." This is the first and fundamental element of the Christian life, deliverance from the penalty of sin.

But, of course, deliverance goes on to refer to the power of sin - "Those that escape," that is, those who are safe from the power of sin. This again, theologically, is sometimes spoken of - perhaps a little inaccurately - as Sanctification; but it will serve for our present purpose - deliverance from the power of sin, whether that power is realized in connection with Satan, or with circumstances, or with self, our three spiritual foes. We read in St. John's Epistle and elsewhere of victory.

This is the thought in connection with the prophecy of Obadiah; escape, deliverance, safety, in regard to the power of sin as it faces us today. Assuming that we have learned what it means to be delivered from the penalty of sin, assuming that we have learned what it means to have entered into that experience, we are to learn more of what deliverance from the power of sin means, the secret of victory over Satan, over the world, and over self. "In Mount Zion there shall be safety."

II. Then comes the thought of sanctity. "And there shall be holiness." It will be worthwhile to remind ourselves afresh of the fundamental conception of "holiness" in the Old Testament and in the New. The root idea is always "separateness". Whether we take the Hebrew word or the Greek, whether we think of the English words connected with holy and holiness, or with saint, sanctification and saintliness, the fundamental, basic thought is "separateness". There is an entirely different set of words connected with purification.

Purification does not enter into the etymology of the word which we translate as "sanctification," though the experience of purity is an essential and vital result and consequence. If we look at a passage like Ephesians 5:26, we see that our Lord gave Himself for the Church that He might sanctify, that is, separate it, "having purified it". There are other texts which clearly mark the distinction between the thought of sanctification and purification. What do we mean by separateness?

Negatively, we are to understand separateness from sin; positively, separateness unto God. "There shall be separateness," or "There shall be sanctity." That is one of the fundamental and predominant notes of the New Testament - separation from, separation unto. This is why places can be called holy. There was no moral virtue in any part of the Tabernacle. It was not purer than any other place, but it was nevertheless called holy, because it was separated unto God. And so it was called a sacred place; because sacred has the same idea as holy - cut off, separated, devoted.

We read that Esau was a "profane person". Our modern idea of "profane" and "profanity" is very specific, and has reference to one or two definite forms of evil. The original idea of "profane" is quite different. Outside every temple there was an enclosure which was perfectly public. It was called by the name of pro fanum, "before the fane," "before the temple". Everybody was allowed there; the ground was trodden on; everybody had a right to do what he liked. But inside was the sacred enclosure, cut off from the rest.

That was the "fane"; the other was the pro fanum. Esau was just that kind of man, not necessarily evil, but what we should call secular. God did not enter into his life. There was no sacred enclosure where God reigned supreme. That is why he was spoken of as a "profane person". There are many today of whom this is true. They never fall into gross or open sin. They are not sensual; perhaps only partially are they sensuous, and yet they are living their life altogether separate from God.

They are secular; there is nothing devoted to God. Let us therefore keep this thought before us. Sanctification in the Bible use of the word is separateness. There are two words in the Greek, as students know, hagios and hosios (■γίος, ■σιος). One means "devoted" and the other means "devout". We are now concerned with the former, and the idea of the Old Testament as well as the New is a life that is separated from everything that is known to be wrong, a life that is devoted to God at all times.

III. Then comes, thirdly, the truth of sufficiency. "And the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions." Safety, sanctity, sufficiency. There was a vast area of land called originally the holy, the separated land, which Israel had allowed to be taken up by their enemy. God had given it to them, but they had not properly possessed it or kept it. The enemy had taken it; and this promise is that the day would come when they should again enter into their heritage and possess their possessions.

Let us think for a moment of the fact of our spiritual possessions in Christ - safety and sanctity, with a view to spiritual possessions in Him. Think of those passages which are familiar to us, though they are well worth putting together. "Shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32). "All things are yours" (1 Cor. 3:22). "Hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3). "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ" (Eph. 1:3).

So, "accepted in Christ" is intended to mean "endowed in Christ". It is not future, "will bless," but past, "has blessed us with all spiritual blessings". In that wonderful passage, Ephesians 1:3-14, we see that the Apostle, after having stated the fact of all spiritual blessings, proceeds to show how these blessings have come - in the purpose of the Father (verses 3-6); by the purchase of the Son (verses 7-12); and by the power of the Spirit (verses 13-14). Each section of that paragraph ends with a similar phrase.

The Father's purpose was intended to be "to the praise of the glory of His grace." The Son's purchase was to be "to the praise of His glory". The Spirit's power was to be "unto the praise of His glory". So, whether eternally purposed in the Father, or historically provided in the Son, or personally applied by the Spirit, these are the possessions which are intended for us, for our abundant provision day by day. There are

many passages in which this specific message is brought before us, but there is one of perhaps special importance.

The very heart of the Christian life will be found in Romans 8:1-4, for not only do they contain the substance of the Gospel for the saint, but there is a wonderful connection between them and the chapters that immediately precede and follow. Verse one of Romans 8 looks back on and takes up Romans 5, "There is no sort of condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus (Greek)." This is how the Christian life begins (Rom. 5:1-11). Verse two of Romans 8 takes up chapter 6, "The Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free."

The whole of chapter 6 is concerned with freedom. Verse three of Romans 8 deals with chapter 7, "What the law could not do"; for Romans 7 is concerned with the powerlessness of the law to give holiness. And verse four of Romans 8 is the germ of the rest of that chapter. So we need freedom from condemnation, we need deliverance; we need to realize the powerlessness of the law of holiness, and then the power of the Spirit to enable us to live according to the will of God; and this is the sum and substance of spiritual possessions.

But, of course, we are also concerned with possessing our possessions, for it is only too possible to have and not to enjoy. There is a familiar story told of a farmer who, after long years of toil, died lamenting that he had so little to leave to his needy sons. The sons had the same idea of their patrimony, and thought very little of it by reason of the poverty of the soil and their inability to realize any value in it. So they sold it to men who knew that underneath there was vast mineral wealth, which they turned in due course to good account.

The father and the sons were potentially rich, possessors of a wonderful property, and yet did not possess their possessions. The Lord Jesus Christ is to many Christians like a vast estate with infinite possibilities, with wealth unexplored, territory uncultivated, beauties not enjoyed and produce unused. Yet God is asking each one of us this question: "Are you possessing your possessions?" Why do Christians so often fail at this vital point? What are some of the reasons why God's people do not possess their possessions?

One is ignorance. They do not know, they do not realize, what their possessions are in Christ Jesus. And yet God desires us to have illumination, enlightenment, "that we may know the things that are freely given to us of God." In other cases it is slothfulness that prevents God's people from entering into their possessions. They have touched the hem of Christ's garment; they have realized something of safety in Him from the penalty of sin, but they do not go forward. There is spiritual sloth, spiritual listlessness; and they do not possess their possessions.

It is self-satisfaction in other cases. They are content with imperfect possession, and therefore imperfect enjoyment. They are content with a lower standard of Christian living than God intends them to have; and they think that we should heed that word: "Be not righteous overmuch." Spiritual self-satisfaction! They believe that we can never accomplish all these things, that we must be content with living for the most part in the experience of Romans 7, and only occasionally getting a glimpse of the glory of Romans 8.

Their experience is something like that seen in a most unfortunate hymn, one that should only be sung with vital alterations: "Fighting, following, keeping, struggling, Is He sure to bless?" That is not full Christianity; it comes from the dark ages of the Greek Church, one of the translations of hymns that are not completely Christian. We also sing: "If I find Him, if I follow, What His guerdon here? Many a sorrow, many a labour, Many a tear." But is this all? May we not say: "If I find Him, if I follow, What His guerdon

here?

Many a joy and many a blessing - Never a fear!" The latter is not worth much as poetry, but it is truer to the New Testament than the original. There is another reason why we do not possess our possessions, and that is timidity. We are afraid. "Know ye that Ramoth in Gilead is ours, and we be still?" That is what many Christians are today; we are still. We read about the road to victory. "Who is he that overcometh?" "His commandments are not grievous." The secret of victory is a wholehearted surrender to Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

Let us see to it that no timidity keeps us from the Promised Land. It has been pointed out that when the spies came back from the visit to Canaan, there was, as someone has said, a Majority Report, and a Minority Report; and very often the Minority Report is correct. The Majority Report told them of the wonderful glories of that land, but also of the enemies and their own inability. The Minority Report was equally clear about the glories of the land, and also about the enemies; but they also said: "We be well able to overcome," because they were thinking not of the Anakim, but of God.

We must never allow timidity to rob us of any part of our possession in the Promised Land. If we look at the rest of this prophecy, from verse eighteen to the end, we shall find the word "possess" in almost every verse; and the one thought running through it is specially that of verse eighteen, "The house of Jacob shall be a fire," with its assurance of victory. "More than conquerors through Him that loved us." God's purpose for every one of us is enjoyment, the enjoyment of all those things that are ours in Christ Jesus, enjoyment not for ourselves, not for anything in the form of what would be called spiritual luxury, but for service, that we may be able through that enjoyment to pass on the joy and the blessing to others.

What is the secret, the simple, all-embracing secret of this Safety, Sanctity, and Sufficiency? The answer is, Faith. Why is faith so emphasized in Scripture? Because it is the only possible response to God's revelation. His faithfulness is to be met by my faith, His truth by my trust. He is trustworthy; therefore I must be trustful. Faith accepts all these things in Christ; faith claims them as our own possession; faith appropriates them to our own personal use; faith uses them to the glory of God.

And this will be the result as we endeavour to possess our possessions. The Christian life is always fourfold. First, it is a life of Inward Peace, the peace of reconciliation, the peace of restfulness - "peace with God" and "the peace of God". Secondly, it will be a life of Upward Progress, progress in knowledge and progress in fellowship, God becoming better known and fellowship with God becoming more fully realized. Thirdly, it will be one of Outward Power, in the sense of victory over sin, power in our equipment for service.

Fourthly, it will be one of Onward Prospect, the prospect of hope, and of its realization. "That blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ," will occupy its proper place on the horizon of our Christian life if we are Christians according to the New Testament pattern. A truth that is found so often in the New Testament must have some real meaning, or it would not be so prominent. The Lord's coming is one of the most powerful incentives to holiness.

"What manner of persons ought ye to be?" Inward Peace, Upward Progress, Outward Power, Onward Prospect. That is Christianity. And if only the Holy Spirit enables us to see and to enter into our possessions, we shall live in our homes, go to our work, serve in our church and continue wherever we may be situated, full of God's blessing, full of His grace, full of His power, to live henceforth as never before to His eternal praise and glory.

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