

GOD'S POWER IN US (1)

• JUDGES 3:8-11 •

"And when the sons of Israel cried to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer. . . ." (3:9).

Em Griffin says that each human being has three social drives: the need for achievement, the need for affiliation, and the need for power. Consider the subject of power. Let us see how God's power can dwell within us.

After explaining how God used the surrounding nations to test Israel in Judges 3:1-7, the writer of the book of Judges introduces the first major oppression. For eight years God's people were enslaved to Mesopotamia under the rulership of King Cushan-rishathaim.

The only source of knowledge we have concerning Cushan-rishathaim is what we read in Judges 3. The meaning of his name is divided into two parts. The first part, Cushan, literally means "son of Cush." The second part, Rishathaim, means "doubly evil." Since the Hittites occupied Mesopotamia at this time, many believe that Cushan-rishathaim was a Hittite conqueror.

Israel was in bondage to the whims and wishes of this heathen ruler until "the sons of Israel cried to the Lord" (3:9). Their crying out indicated to Jehovah that His children had repented of the evil which brought on this oppression. In response to their cries, "the Lord raised up a deliverer for the sons of Israel to deliver them" (3:9).

"Deliverer" is the meaning of the word "judge." A judge wore many hats. In addition to

settling personal and tribal disputes between the people, he also had the spiritual work of upholding the cause of Jehovah. When necessary, he would serve as the commanding general on the battleground.

The first judge was Othniel, the son-in-law of Caleb (1:12, 13). He earned the hand of Caleb's daughter in marriage by conquering the city of Debir. We are not told much about this man or how he went about delivering Israel from Mesopotamia. We simply read that he "went out to war" and "prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim" (3:10). This marked the end of eight years of slavery and began a period of forty years during which "the land had rest" (3:11).

Since the Hittites were a fierce, warring nation, one wonders how this obscure judge was able to defeat them. The answer is found in verse 10: "The Spirit of the Lord came upon him." This phrase is used five other times in Judges, and each time it signals God's power in the life of His chosen one. Many times a miraculous empowering came when the Spirit of the Lord came upon someone. This enabling power was given to Gideon before he defeated the Midianites (6:34) and to Jephthah before he led the victory against the nation of Ammon (11:29). The Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson on at least three separate occasions: when he was fighting a group of Philistine soldiers (13:25), when he killed a lion (14:6), and when he killed thirty men at once and took their spoil to repay those who had solved

his riddle (14:19). God gave these men the power to accomplish the tasks He gave them to do.

We see His power in the life of Othniel as he led the fight against the mighty forces of Mesopotamia. The Spirit of the Lord was given to him, and Othniel became equal to the challenge. God won the battle. He simply needed a human instrument to lead His people. What a lesson! God gives His children tasks to accomplish, but, with every task, God promises to give us the strength and the ability to do it. He merely needs us to be available for His use.

THE POWER TO HERALD

God has given His children the task of making “disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 28:19). The immensity of this task is comprehended to a small degree when I attend a professional football game. To look around at a stadium packed with over sixty thousand people and to imagine God giving me the task of teaching each one about Jesus is almost too much for me to contemplate. How long would it take to carry the gospel to all of those people? What an unbelievable challenge that would be. But God has given us a much bigger job. God has not told us to teach the thousands at a football game. God has told us to teach the billions who fill the world. How can we do it? Jesus concluded His commission to us in Matthew 28:20 with the promise, “Lo, I am with you always.” That is the answer! We can do it because God can do it! All He requires from us is that we be available for His use. If every child of God would be available for His use, this world would be evangelized.

THE POWER TO HELP

God has asked His children to be concerned about the needs of others. During the first century, churches throughout the Roman world gave money to send to the poor saints in Jerusalem. As Paul encouraged the Corinthian brethren to contribute, he said, “Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7). A prophet of God foretold that a severe famine would encompass the entire world (Acts 11:28). In response to this prediction, the saints in Antioch determined to send relief to Judea (Acts 11:29, 30). This led to a worldwide effort to gather money for the church in Jerusa-

lem. What an unbelievable spirit of generosity! How can God’s people be so unselfish in their giving? The answer is found in 2 Corinthians 9:8: “God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed.”

God’s call for us to give to help others is not a call to take a vow of poverty. God assures us that our own needs will be met. If we will present ourselves as tools in His hands, He will use our efforts to richly bless the lives of others while filling our lives with every possible blessing.

God has given His children the task of comforting others. Since most of us do not have a degree in counseling, we do not feel qualified to help others with their problems. Many brethren suffer silently because no one seeks to help them. Someone might respond, “I am not God. I don’t have the ability to help others with their problems. I have enough of my own.” Paul said God comforted us in our troubles “so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Corinthians 1:4).

CONCLUSION

God has admonished us to become more like Him in life and character. How can sinful human beings become like God? In 2 Corinthians 3:18 we are told that “we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory.” By looking upon Jesus, we gradually become more like Him until we eventually bear “the same image.” What is the secret of this transformation? The answer is in the last phrase of 2 Corinthians 3:18. Paul says this transformation takes place by the Spirit. The Spirit which empowered Othniel and the other judges is the same Spirit which enables us to be changed to bear God’s image. The Spirit does not act miraculously as He did in the days of the judges. The Word of God is the sword of the Spirit today, but it is the same Spirit which changes us. That is why the traits that make us more like God (i.e., love, joy, peace) are referred to as “the fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22, 23).

God did not set us upon this earth to fend for ourselves. He is with us as long as we will follow where He leads. No task is so great that God and I cannot do it together!

—Craig Tappe