

HIS TOUCH HAS STILL ITS ANCIENT POWER

by

THOMAS B. REES

Printed @ August 1945

CHAPTER ONE -

THE POWER OF GOD

"For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ" (Romans 1:16) . . . This is a faithful saying, . . . Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief" (I Timothy 1:15).

"IT'S high time you Christians stopped all this talking and preaching about religion and started to DO something. Get to work and clear the slums, help to put an end to the great social injustices of our day; go and educate the ignorant in this and other lands; improve our prison system, care for the orphans, provide hospitals for the sick, and make this world a place fit to live in, and as for your Christianity, well you can..."

Hey! Just a minute! just a minute! Again and again we hear men and women of our generation talking like this, and it is time the point was cleared up.

In the first place, let me say emphatically that all the good works mentioned above, yes, and countless others beside, spring directly or indirectly from the Gospel of CHRIST.

- Education was commenced centuries ago by Christian men and women.
- The great hospitals of our time were founded by followers of the great Physician Himself.
- Comparatively few realize how much the prisons in this land and on the continent of Europe owe to the ceaseless labours of Elizabeth Fry.

Yet Mrs. Fry herself lived a self-centred life until the light of the glorious Gospel shined in her heart.

Although in His day more than a quarter of the people of the Roman Empire were slaves, the Son of GOD, so far as we know, never once preached against slavery. But by His death and resurrection He made the Christian Gospel what it is, and eventually through men like William Wilberforce, who preached that Gospel, slavery was abolished. And what shall I more say? For the time would fail me to tell of Livingstone and Carey, William Booth and Wilson Carlile, Barnardo and Muller, Moody and Shaftesbury, who through faith emancipated slaves, fed the hungry, clothed the naked, lifted the fallen, cared for the orphan, championed the oppressed, and healed the sick. And get this clear: those men did these deeds not in spite of Christianity, but because of it.

CHRIST's Gospel not only destroys the evil fruit, but strikes directly at the root. Sickness,

suffering, social injustice, poverty, war, and a host of other evils, including death itself, all arise from one great ugly fact, that men are not right with GOD. But the message of CHRIST is this, that through His death and resurrection men can get right with GOD, not only being pardoned but also being empowered to do His will.

Thank GOD for the social workers who take people out of the slums, but who are often the first to admit that only the Gospel can take the slums out of the people.

In the 18th century this beloved land of ours was in even greater darkness than it is to-day, both spiritually and morally. The bloody revolution which was sweeping France threatened these shores. But in one short generation a mighty transformation took place, the fruits of which we enjoy to this very day. A small company of consecrated young men led by John Wesley had gone from place to place "offering CHRIST freely to the people." Nothing short of another revival of New Testament Christianity can meet the situation in our day.

Every true Christian rejoices in the Ten Commandments and all the unique ethical teachings of our Lord, but the Gospel of the New Testament is something more than commandments and ethics. For, once received, it not only tells a man what he ought to do, but it also gives him the desire and power to do it. The Apostle Paul puts it this way: "**For it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of His good pleasure**" (Philippians 2:13).

It is our Christian duty to pray for GOD's blessing upon those who are called to devote their lives to such work as temperance, moral rescue and social reform, but we must watch that these good works, although undoubtedly the by-products of the Gospel, never take the place of the Gospel itself. These self-sacrificing workers doubtless alleviate endless suffering, *but it is only through the Gospel that men and women can be made new creatures, receiving not only outward reformation, but what is far more, inward regeneration.*

It took nothing less than the touch of the mighty Hand of the Risen CHRIST to perform such a miracle in the heart and life of a desperate character, whom I call Jackson. Let me tell you his story.

I was in the train on my way to a south coast town where I was to conduct a mission. I had a compartment to myself, and was spending part of the time in prayer for the coming campaign. As I was praying, I was very conscious that GOD was speaking to me. I have never been one to experience "visions or voices in the night," but this time it seemed clear that GOD was telling me to seek the worst man in the parish and go and tell him that GOD loved him. I wondered how could find such a man. Should I seek out a bad man, and say to him, "Do you know a worse man than yourself?" and so on, until I reached the very worst? However, I was sure that as GOD had spoken, He would guide.

The next morning at breakfast, the vicar looked up at me and said, "Do you know, Rees, we have a man here who is a real menace to the district. Been in and out of prison all his life. I don't think he's ever done an honest day's work. He gets money by housebreaking, drinks it all, goes to prison, comes out, and starts it all over again. The other day I set him to work rolling my lawn, but on looking out of the window, I saw Jackson and the roller disappearing out of the gate. When I gave chase he pushed the roller into the ditch and made off. A most desperate character."

Then I remembered, and asked the vicar: "Would you say he was the worst man in the parish?"

"Oh, easily the worst; why?"

"I'd like to have his address, I have a message for him."

"You have a message for Jackson? Whoever would give you a message for him?"

"I have a message from GOD," and I went on to tell the vicar of my experience in the train. He wished me a rather doubtful godspeed as I set out on my way through the back streets of the town to where Jackson lived.

In answer to my knock a typical jail-bird came to the door - unwashed, unshaven, and only half dressed. "Yus, whaddyer want" he demanded.

"I'm conducting a mission in the church here. I was coming down in the train and GOD told me to find the worst man in the parish and tell him that GOD loved him."

"Well, whaddyer want with me?"

"The vicar tells me that you are the worst man."

"Oh, 'ee does, does' ee? Well, now you've got me, whaddyer want with me?"

"I've come to tell you that GOD loves you!" There was a moment's pause; Jackson seemed taken aback, then he shouted.

"Get out!"

"No," I said, "I'm not going out until I've told you again that GOD loves you, and that the Lord JESUS died for you. And I believe if it were necessary, He would die again for you."

"Get out, or I'll throw you out!" There was a bang, I was on the outside, Jackson was on the inside.

As I went to bed that evening I prayed most earnestly for Jackson, and the Lord spoke again. This time I found it hard to believe that it was GOD speaking, but the message persisted. "Go and offer Jackson five shillings to come and hear you preach." I am well aware that anyone who comes to hear me preach deserves five shillings, but I had never made a practice of such bribes! However, the next day I found myself again outside the door of Jackson's home.

"Whaddyer want now?"

"Do you want to earn five bob?"

"Yus," Jackson dropped his menacing attitude.

"I'm preaching at the church to-night, and I'll give you five shillings if you'll come and hear me. You can come in late and go out early and then collect the money at the vicarage to-morrow morning."

His eyes narrowed. "What, you, a gentleman in your position, doing the work you're doing, bribing people to go to church. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, you did!"

I was, and walked gloomily away. "Hi, Mister!" Jackson called after me, "What time does it start"

How well I remember that night, the thirty-first of March.

I looked all round the congregation in vain, Jackson was nowhere to be seen. Then suddenly I spotted him. There he was under my nose, in the very front row. Yes, he had come.

On the strength of my promise he had borrowed half a crown from a neighbour and fortified himself with a little "Dutch courage." However, he was determined that no one should have the satisfaction of seeing him listen. He meant to employ the time usefully. With a heap of tobacco on one side, and some cigarette papers on the other, he spent the entire time neatly rolling cigarettes, and putting them into his cap. When I announced the last hymn, he rose to his feet and stamped angrily down the aisle, slamming the door behind him.

"Where've you been?" said his wife.

"To church."

"To church!" she shouted. "Now what mischief have you been up to there?"

"Earnin' five bob. A chap called Rees offered me five bob to go and hear him preach. I'm collecting it at the vicarage to-morrow morning."

"To-morrow morning, eh?" A slow smile spread over her face. "He's got you there, Harry; to-morrow's April the first.

"He'll make a fine fool of you, you see if he doesn't." Jackson walked out with an oath.

"A man at the door to see you, sir." This message was brought to me as I sat at breakfast the following morning.

There was Jackson. "Come for the five bob?" I said.

"Dunno about that, but I'll tell you what. You fair put the wind up me last night. Couldn't sleep a wink all night."

"Getting the wind up won't save you," I said, "putting your trust in CHRIST is the only thing that will."

"Oh, you can keep your religion; give us the five bob," and off he went, collecting from outside

the gate a load of wood he had just stolen from the house next door.

That vicar's wife was a mighty prayer-warrior. She could remember D. L. Moody's missions; the great evangelist had stayed in her home when she was a girl, and she had never lost the power to lay hold of GOD in prayer that she had learned then. As I write these lines I can hear her praying, "O GOD, we lay this man's soul down as a challenge to Thee."

It is very often the case that those for whom we pray, instead of turning gradually to GOD, appear to go further away, and seem more difficult to reach. It may be that the enemy of souls knows that once we get on our knees in believing prayer for a soul the fight has begun in earnest, and he strives desperately to keep his captive enslaved.

During the weeks that followed, Jackson went from bad to worse, so that even his faithful wife could stand life with him no longer, and left him, taking the children with her, leaving a message to say that she had gone to London.

The fact that his only real friend had forsaken him brought this chief of sinners to his senses. He was desperate, and while walking through the main streets of the town, on a sudden impulse, he stood still, snatched off his cap, shut his eyes, and prayed: "O GOD, if there is a GOD, show me where my wife."

He opened his eyes, and there, a few paces away from him, was his wife. She had turned the corner while his eyes were closed in prayer. He ran towards her, but she escaped. Jackson went straight to the church where GOD had first spoken to him, and kneeling down at the Communion rail, he prayed the only prayer he knew: "**God be merciful to me a sinner.**"

"Scales seemed to fall from my eyes and I saw," he said afterwards.

One of the first things this new-born soul did, was to go round to the houses he had broken into, and confess to the owners. At one house he said to the householder, "Your house was recently broken into, wasn't it?"

"Yes, that's right."

"You had some silver, and some valuables stolen?"

"Yes."

"Well . . . I did it, and I've come to give myself up."

"But why are you telling me this?"

"It's like this, I've just trusted CHRIST as my SAVIOUR, and He's forgiven me all my sins, and I wanted to put things right, if I could."

Jackson found his hand gripped and wrung. "GOD bless you, my friend, I belong to CHRIST too!"

I was invited for meetings in that district again, and the vicar asked me to stay with him. I wrote back thanking him, but explaining that I had already promised to stay with my friends Mr. and Mrs. Jackson. What a happy Christian home that was. It had not been easy for Jackson to persuade his wife that his conversion was genuine, but he was so transformed that not only did she return to him, but she herself became a Christian. I have stayed in many Christian homes, but never in one where I was made more welcome.

"It's funny," said Jackson, as we sat by the fire, "I can't ever remember the time, from being a lad, when I was able to pass a public house with money in my pocket, but now the very smell of it makes me feel sick."

On a number of occasions Jackson has come with me to camp as cook, and if ever I had to leave the camp, I would toss the keys of the cash box to him and say, "Look after things till I get back." I knew I could trust the ex-burglar with all that I had.

~ end of chapter 1 ~
