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TITLE:

The Word of a King

TEXT:

Ecclesiastes 8:4

SUMMARY:

Because God is monarch, His Word has power. Spurgeon first shows how the power of the Word excites our awe of Him. He shows in creation and redemptive history the power of God spoken in His Word. Second, he highlights the power of the Word of God in ensuring our obedience to it. Third, the power of the Word inspires our confidence. If we struggle with remaining corruption, there is power in the Word of God to cleanse us. Fourth, the power of the Word directs our efforts. We need the Word of God to do the work of God.

NOTABLE QUOTES

“Christians should more diligently search the Word to find out what the will of the Lord is on all matters affecting their everyday life.”

“We should tremble at God’s Word, and humble ourselves in the dust before Him, praying to be cleansed by His grace.”

“Spiritual work can only be done by spiritual power.”

A sermon preached by Charles H. Spurgeon on March 22, 1873. *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. 19.

The Word of a King

Where the word of a king is, there is power.

ECCLESIASTES 8:4

KINGS IN SOLOMON'S DAY had a vast amount of power, for their word was absolute. They did according to their own will, and none could check them, for, as Solomon said, “The wrath of a king is like the roaring of a lion; Whoever provokes him to anger sins against his own life” (Prov. 20:2). When such a monarch happened to be wise and good, it was a great blessing to the people; for “a king who sits on the throne of judgment scatters all evil with his eyes” (Prov. 20:8). But if he was of a hard, tyrannical nature, his subjects were mere slaves and groaned beneath a yoke of iron.

We do not sufficiently give thanks for the blessings of a constitutional government, but if we were for a season put beneath the power of a grinding despotism, we should set more store by those liberties for which we have to thank our Puritan ancestors. Mercies are seldom appreciated till they are taken away.

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May we not prove ungrateful under free institutions, for if so, we shall be more brutish than any men.

There is, however, one King whose power we do not wish in any degree to limit or circumscribe. God does as He wills among the armies of heaven and the inhabitants of this lower world. None can stay His hand or say to Him, “What are you doing?” In this we greatly rejoice. The personal rule of one individual would be the best form of government if that individual were perfectly good, infinitely wise, and abundant in power. An autocrat turns into a despot because there is no man who is perfectly good, unselfish, or wise.

God has no fault or failing, and therefore it is a joy that He does according to His will. He never wills anything that is not strictly just; He is neither unjust nor unmerciful. He cannot err, and therefore it is a great subject for joy that “the LORD reigns” (Ps. 93:1).

Now, because God is the absolute Monarch, His word has power about it, and of that word of power I am going to speak at this time. May the Holy Spirit help us to think of the power of God’s word for four purposes—first, to excite our awe; second, to ensure our obedience; third, to inspire our confidence; and fourth, to direct our efforts.

EXCITE OUR AWE

First, we would see the power of the Word of the Lord in order to excite our awe of Him. What are we poor creatures of a day? What is there in us as we appear in God’s sight? Do we not

pass away as the flower of the field? As for our word, what is it? We sometimes talk exceedingly proudly, and we say “shall” and “will” as if we could do anything when, after all, our word is but breath, a vapor, a mere sound in the air. Man proposes, but God disposes; man resolves, but God dissolves. That which man expects, God rejects, for the Word of the Lord stands forever, but man passes away and is not.

Think of the day before all days when there was no day but the Ancient of Days, and when God dwelled all alone, then He willed in His mind that there should be a world created: “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, And all the host of them by the breath of His mouth” (Ps. 33:6). What a word is that which created all things! And remember that this same word can destroy all things, for “the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men” (2 Peter 3:7). If He were but to speak, all things that are would melt away as a moment’s foam dissolves into the wave that bears it and is lost forever.

When the Lord created, He used no hand of cherubim or seraphim. All that we read in the sublimely simple record of Genesis is, “God said, let there be,” and there was. His word accomplished all, and when He wills to destroy either one man or a million, His word is able to work His will. What a mighty word cut off the host of Sennacherib and slew the firstborn of Egypt! The word of the Lord commanded the floodwaters, and they drowned a guilty world, and that same word rained fire from heaven upon Sodom and Gomorrah. Even so in the last

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day; when the word shall go forth from Him, He shall shake not only the earth but also heaven, and at His word of power both heaven and earth shall flee away. Great God, we do adore you, for you are both Creator and Destroyer by your word!

Think how God's word both makes alive and kills. He promised Abraham that he should have a seed in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed. It seemed impossible that there should come from him a son that should be the founder of a race—his body was dead, and Sarah was old—yet God in due time made them to laugh, for Isaac was born into the house.

It is the Lord who makes alive, and equally it is the Lord who kills. It only needs God to will it, and the pestilence lays men low in heaps like the grass of the meadow when the mower's scythe has passed over it. The Lord has but to call for pestilence or war, and myriads of men are laid low. If He wills to chasten by famine, He calls for devouring insects, and they invade the land. Oh, how we ought to worship you, you dread Supreme, upon whose word life and death are made to hang!

I might in another division of this part of my subject remind you of the power which attends both His promises and His threatenings. God has never promised without performing in due time to the last jot and tittle. Has He said, and shall He not do it? Has He commanded, and shall it not come to pass? The gifts and calling of God are without repentance; He turns not from His covenant engagements and swerves not from the performance of His word.

Those who have resisted Him have found His threatenings to be true also: let Pharaoh confess how the plagues followed fast

upon the word of the Lord till even his stout heart was melted within him. Men have gone on for a while resisting God and in their pride have laughed Him to scorn, but by-and-by He has spoken to them in His wrath and vexed them in His hot displeasure. Who can stand against this terrible God, whose word overthrows the mighty and casts the proud beneath His feet?

There is power in God's word to foretell so that, when He tells what is to be in the future, we know that it shall come to pass. Thus says the Lord, "Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it" (Isa. 46:11). In the word of the Lord also there is power to predestinate as well as to foretell so that what He decrees is fixed and certain. The Lord has said it, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure" (Isa. 46:10). Let this be your joy today, that whatever is promised of the latter day and of the glory that is to be revealed, is sure to come to pass, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it.

It seems impossible that the heathen should ever be the Lord's or that the uttermost parts of the earth should be Christ's possession, but it will be, for the King has said it, and "Where the word of a king is, there is power." We fear that the time will never arrive when peace shall reign through all the world, and when men shall hang the helmet in the hall and study war no more; but the vision of faith shall yet become a fact, for, "Where the word of a king is, there is power."

He spoke of old of Edom and Moab, Philistia and Ammon, Nineveh and Babylon, Greece and Borne, and whatsoever He has spoken has been fulfilled. Not one word of the prophecies

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of Daniel and Ezekiel has failed of its accomplishment, and we may be sure that not one glorious vision of the seer of Patmos will remain a dream. Let us worship the great Ordainer, Benefactor, and Ruler, whose every word is the word of a King, in which there is power.

ENSURE OUR OBEDIENCE

Second, we would think of the power of God's word in order to ensure our obedience to it. Whenever God gives a word of command, it comes to us clothed with authority, and its power over our minds should be immediate and unquestioned. I hope that in laying the foundation of the spiritual building that is to be erected in connection with this place you will take care to do it according to the directions of the divine statute book. One is our Master, even Christ, and we must do our Master's will, not our own.

Some Christian people do not view the authority of God's word as paramount but instead consult human leaders or their predilections. This is to begin with the word of man, a weak and sandy foundation; I beseech you—do not so. To Christians the word of God is the only rule of faith and practice. Our doctrine is of authority because it is God's word, and for no other reason. Our ordinances are valid because instituted by God's word; they are idle ceremonies if they be not so commanded. All the rites, rules, and regulations of man are of no value.

The book of human decrees is not to be regarded in the church of Christ. You may put in the front of it, "printed by

authority,” but to the church of Christ it has no authority. You may adopt a creed as the standard of any particular church, but that gives it no authority to bind the conscience. It may be authorized by princes, bishops, and holy men, but wherein it differs from the Word of the Lord, or adds thereto, it is to the children of God as a puff of wind. The sole authority in the church is Christ Himself; He is the head of His church, and His word is the only authority by which we are ruled, for “where the word of a king is, there is power.” But all are usurpers who act as lords in the church where Jesus alone is Master and Lord.

Christians should more diligently search the word to find out what the will of the Lord is on all matters affecting their everyday life. A loyal subject of the great King wants to know what the King would have him do; when he knows it, it is not for him to question or to cavil but to obey. Brethren, let us obey in all things the King’s Word, and give to His holy Word the honor that it justly claims, for “where the word of a king is, there is power.” Every precept that He gives He intends us to keep. He does not ordain it that we may question it; He commands that we may obey.

Let me refer you to what Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 8:2, “I say, ‘Keep the king’s commandment.’” This is admirable counsel for every Christian; if the commandment were of men, even the wisest of men, we might break it, and perhaps do right in breaking it. But if it be the King who gives the command, even the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the King in Zion, then the advice of the Preacher is wise and weighty.

Perhaps some of you would ask me, “What is the best course for me to pursue in certain difficult cases?” “Keep the King’s

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commandment.” If He be a King, then it is a solemn hazard to your soul if you come short of the least of His commandments. Remember that one treason makes a traitor; one leak sinks a ship; one fly spoils the whole box of ointment. He that bought us with His blood deserves to be obeyed in all things with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. Such a King as we have ought never to hear us ask the reason why He commands.

Solomon goes on to say, “Do not be hasty to go from his presence” (Eccl. 8:3). There is such power in God’s word that I would have you also obey this precept and seek to remain in His presence. Some of His people seek to get away from their Lord instead of keeping close to Him. So little do they delight in communion with their God that they seem to say, “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?” (Ps. 139:7).

Did it never happen to you as it did to Jonah, when he must needs go to Tarshish, though the Lord told him to go to Nineveh? He did not want such a large field of labor, such an anxious and unremunerative post of duty. He would rather go to a village or a seaside place. For a time he believed that providence helped him, for he found a ship going to Tarshish. There are many devil’s providences that make sin easy and obedience difficult. The precept, not the providence, is the rule of duty. The providence that gave Judas the opportunity to sell his Master did not excuse that son of perdition. Alas, poor Jonah, to be thus eager to run counter to the word of a King!

I remember how I felt when first in London: I could not endure the horrible wilderness of bricks by which I was surrounded. I sighed for the green fields and the fresh air and

longed to get back to my country charge. But this kind of self-indulgence will not do: “Where the word of a king is, there is power,” and wherever the King sends you, you must go, and go without questioning. If He should send you to preach at the gates of hell, go and preach there.

“Do not be hasty to go from his presence,” for if you get out of the sight of the King, if you no longer wait in His blessed presence, depend upon it, like Jonah you will fall into trial, tempest, sinking, and terror. There may be no whale to swallow you and cast you up again—they are not so plentiful now as they were then—and you may not be delivered so easily as Jonah. Keep in the Lord’s presence and favor, no matter where you may have to go in order to do so. Walk in communion with Christ in whatever path He may point out to you. Never mind how rough it is. Do not imagine it is the wrong road because it is so rough; rather, reckon it to be right because it is rough, for seldom do smoothness and rightness go together. Oh, to abide in Christ the Word and to have His word abiding in us!

Solomon then says, “Do not take your stand for an evil thing.” There is such power in the Word of God that He can readily destroy you or heavily chastise you, therefore be quick to amend, and “do not take your stand for an evil thing.” Repent, obey, submit, confess, seek pardon at once. If at any time you offend against your gracious Sovereign, and He frown on you, humble yourself, for His stroke is heavy.

Have a tender mouth; let God guide you with His eye, let a word be enough for you, do not need a bit or bridle. I wish we all had great tenderness of conscience. We should tremble at God’s Word and humble ourselves in the dust before Him,

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praying to be cleansed by His grace. Sin should be impossible to a believer who lives in the presence of the King, in whose word there is power. Will you offend Him to His face and slight Him in His own courts? No; yield yourself to His mercy and let your holy life prove that His word has power over your heart and conscience.

INSPIRE OUR CONFIDENCE

And now, third, to inspire our confidence, let us think that “where the word of a king is, there is power.” The word of His is not a mere sound; there is the power of truth in it. If you do what He bids, you shall find that He can and will abundantly pardon. Whatever sins you have committed, though they are too many to count and too awful to mention, if you will come and trust yourself with Jesus Christ, God’s word is that you shall be saved; and saved you shall be. “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life” (John 3:36). Come and plead these words now, you who feel your sinfulness, and you shall prove in your joyful experience that they are the power of God unto salvation. Even the very worst may come and plead the promises, and they shall obtain immediate pardon and full forgiveness, and their soul shall know it because of the sweet peace that comes from forgiven sin.

Do you tell me that you cannot conquer your evil passions and corrupt desires? Here is a promise from the Word of the Lord: “I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit

within you” (Ezek. 36:25–26). Come and plead these precious promises; there is power in them. They are the words of a King, and if you plead them at the mercy seat, you shall become a new creature in Christ Jesus. Old things shall pass away; all things shall become new.

When you get a promise from God, treat it as undoubted truth and rely upon it as you do upon the promise of your father or friend. Though there are men around you whose promises you never can believe, God’s word is not like that of false and fickle mortals. No charge of falsehood or failure can be brought against the God of truth. He has never broken His word yet, and He never will. Then, dear souls, if you want forgiveness of sin and renewal of heart, get the promise to that effect and believe it with all your soul. As sure as it is the word of a King you shall be washed in the blood and in the water that flowed from the wounded side of the crucified Christ.

And you, Christian people, are you struggling at this time with a remaining corruption you cannot conquer? Come, lay hold of the promise that you shall overcome, and plead it before the mercy seat. If you do but get any promise of God suited to your case, make quick use of it for there is power in it; it is the word of a King! The promise of the Lord will bear the weight of sin and justice, life and death, judgment and hell. Lean your whole weight on the word, and you shall find it to be like Mount Zion which cannot be removed but abides forever.

For my own part, I have no shadow of a hope but in the Word of the Lord; His Spirit has delivered me from all reliance upon duties, or feelings, or experiences. The Word of the Lord is the

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life of my soul. In the words of King Jesus, there is power to save you, to renew you, to pardon you, to preserve you, to sanctify you, and to perfect you. If you have hold on the promises, they will hold you for time and eternity too.

Then, also, are there any of you in great trouble? I cannot know all your cases, but if any one of you has a trial that you could not tell or a trouble that nobody could help you out of, go and spread it before the Lord. Remember His Word, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all” (Ps. 34:19). Go and tell Him that He has thus spoken and that He has therein pledged Himself to deliver you out of all afflictions. Be sure of this, He will be as good as His Word.

Do you expect soon to die? Are you somewhat distressed because sickness is undermining your constitution? Be not afraid, for His Spirit teaches you to sing, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me” (Ps. 23:4). Go and tell the Lord of His own Word, and you will look forward to death without fear.

Brethren, one more point is gained concerning the fear of death when we remember that the voice of a King will recall our bodies from the grave, and, “where the word of a king is, there is power.” Do we ask mournfully as we survey the graveyard, “Can these dry bones live?” We are not slow to answer with assurance of faith. He who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, will also bring forth from their sepulchers all His sheep: “If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised

Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you” (Rom. 8:11). We do not doubt this when we remember that with the trump of the archangel shall also be heard the voice of God, which voice shall speak the word omnipotent.

DIRECT YOUR EFFORTS

Fourth, my text is to be used to direct your efforts. You need power; not the power of money, or mind, or influence, or numbers; but “power from on high” (Luke 24:49). All other power may be desirable, but this power is indispensable. Spiritual work can only be done by spiritual power. I counsel you in order to get spiritual power in all that you do to keep the King’s commandment, for “where the word of a king is, there is power.” Lay not a stone of your spiritual church without His overseeing; do all things according as He has ordained. Regard Him as the wise Master-builder, and be all of you under the command of His word.

The day comes when much that has been built shall be destroyed, for the fire will try every man’s work of what sort it is. It is easy to heap up a church with wood, hay, and stubble, which the fire will soon destroy; and it is very hard work to build one up with gold, silver, and precious stones, for these are rare materials and must be diligently sought for, laboriously prepared, and carefully guarded. The materials that will stand the fire of temptation, trial, death, and the like are not to be brought together by any word but the Word of the Lord.

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But these alone are worth having. I would sooner have half a dozen Christian people truly spiritual and obedient to the Word of the Lord in all things than I would have half a dozen thousands of nominal Christians who neither care about the Word nor the King.

If you want power, keep the King's commandment, keep close to it in all things, and make it the law of your house and the motto of your flag. Wherein you go beyond the word, you go beyond the power, and wherein you stop short of the word, you also stop short of the power. In the King's word there is power, and you will have power as long as you keep to it. Real power is nowhere else to be found. Let us take care that we do not look elsewhere for power, for that will be leaving the fountains of living waters to hew out to ourselves broken cisterns that hold no water.

I fear that some Christian people have been looking in many other directions for the power that can only be found in the word of the King. At one time we were told that power lay in an educated ministry. This superstition has suffered many a blow from the manifest successes of those whose only language is the grand old Saxon. Then the cry was, "Well, really, we do not want these men of education; we need fluent speakers, men who can tell a great many anecdotes and stories. These are men of power." I hope we shall outgrow this delusion also. The Lord works by either of these classes of men, or by others who have not the qualifications of either of them, or by another sort of men, or fifty sorts of men, so long as they keep to the word of the King, in which there is power.

There is power in the gospel if it be preached by a man utterly without education: unlearned men have done great things by the power of the word. The polished doctor of divinity has been equally useful when he has kept to his Master's word. But if either of these has forgotten to make Christ's word first and last, the preaching has been alike powerless, whether uttered by the illiterate or the profound.

Others have thought it necessary, in order to have power among the masses, that there should be fine music. An organ is nowadays thought to be the power of God, and a choir is a fine substitute for the Holy Ghost. They have tried that kind of thing in America, where solos and quartets enable singing men and singing women to divide their services between the church and the theatre. Some churches have paid more attention to the choir than to the preaching. I do not believe in it. If God had meant people to be converted in that way, He would have sent them a command to attend the music halls and operas, for there they will get far better music than we can hope to give them. If there be charms in music to change the souls of men from sin to holiness, and if the preaching of the gospel will not do it, let us have done with Peter and Paul, with Chalmers and with Chrysostom, and let us exalt Mozart and Handel into their places, and let the great singers of the day take the places of the pleaders for the Lord. Even this would not content the maniacs of this age, for with the music room they crave the frippery of the theatre.

Combine with philosophy the sweet flowers of oratory, and then you can exclaim, with the idolaters of old, "These be thy

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gods, O Israel” (Exod. 32:4 KJV). Men are now looking for omnipotence in toys. But we do not believe it. We come back to this, “Where the word of a king is, there is power,” and while we are prepared to admit that all and everything that has to do with us can be the vehicle of spiritual power if God so wills, we are more than ever convinced that God has spiritual power to give by His word alone. We must keep to the King’s word if we desire to have this spiritual power for the Lord’s work.

Whatsoever you find in Scripture to be the command of the King, follow it, though it leads you into a course that is hard for the flesh to bear: I mean a path of singular spirituality, and nonconformity to the world. Remember that, after all, the truth may be with the half dozen and not with the million. Christ’s power may be with the handful as it was at Pentecost, when the power came down upon the despised disciples, and not upon the chief priests and scribes, though they had the sway in religious matters.

If we want to win souls for Christ, we must use the Word of God to do it. Other forms of good work languish unless the gospel is joined with them. Set about reforming, civilizing, and elevating the people, and you will lose your time unless you evangelize them. The total abstinence movement is good, and I would that all would aid it, but it affects little unless the gospel furnishes the motive and the force. The rod works no wonder till Moses grasps it, and moral teaching has small force till Jesus operates by it.

Those who doubt the power of the gospel and leave it for other forms of hopeful good leave strength for weakness, omnipotence for insufficiency. More and more I am persuaded

that it is where the word of a King is that there is power, and all the rest is feebleness until that word has infused might into it. Everyone must buy his own experience, but mine goes to prove to me that the direct and downright preaching of the gospel is the most profitable work that I ever engage in: it brings more glory to God and good to men than all lecturing and addressing upon moral subjects. I should always, if I were a farmer, like to sow that seed that would bring me in the best return for my labor. Preaching the gospel is the most paying thing in the world; it is remunerative in the very highest sense. May your minister stick to the gospel, the old-fashioned gospel, and preach nothing else but Jesus Christ and Him crucified. If people will not hear that, do not let them hear anything at all; it is better to be silent than to preach anything else. Paul said, and I will say the same, "I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2).

Then again, if you want power, you must use this Word in pleading. If your work here is to be a success, there must be much praying; everything in God's house is to be done with prayer. Give me a praying people, and I shall have a powerful people. The Word of the Lord gives power to our prayers. There is power in accepting that word, in getting it into you or receiving it. You never keep the truth till you have received this word of a King into your spiritual being and absorbed it into your spiritual nature. Oh, that you might every one of you eat the Word, live on it, and make it your daily food!

And then, there is power in the practicing of it. Where there is life through the King's word, it will be a strong life. The sinner's life is a feeble life; but an obedient life, an earnest Christian

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life, is a life of strength. Even those who hate it and abhor it cannot help feeling that there is a strange influence about it which they cannot explain, and they must respect it.

You will see its power in this place; I know you will see it, for you are resolved in God's strength that it shall be so. You will see its power to fill the place. There is nothing so attractive as the gospel of Christ. That one silver bell of the gospel has more melody in it than can be drawn from all the bells in all the steeples in the world. There is more sweetness in that one name Jesus than in all the harps of angels, let alone the music of men. When Jesus Christ's deity is denied in any chapel, it soon becomes a howling wilderness. If Christ, the Son of God, is gone, all is gone.

When you preach the gospel, souls will be saved. To secure that end, you must stick to the gospel, for that is the one means ordained by God for the conversion of sinners. We must teach the King's word if our work is to be blessed to the salvation of souls. We must plough with the law, and let the people know what sin means and what repentance means. Then we may hopefully sow them with the gospel. Some time ago we were told that there was no need of repentance, and that repentance only meant a change of mind, but what a tremendous change of mind true repentance does mean! Never speak lightly of repentance.

Then, too, the preaching of the truth, and the whole truth, will bring a power of union among you so that you who love the Lord will be heartily united. When Christian people quarrel, it is generally because they do not get sufficient spiritual food.

Dogs fight when there are no bones, and church members fall out when there is no spiritual food. We must give them plenty of gospel, for the gospel has the power of sweetening the temper and making us put up with one another.

Preach the King's word, for it will give you power in private prayer, power in the Sunday school, power in the prayer meeting, power in everything that you do because you will live upon the King's own word, and His Word is meat to the soul.

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