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SPIRITUAL POWER OUTAGE!

Today's Text: Zech. Chap. 4

Extracts:

So I answered and spoke to the angel who talked with me, saying, "What are these, my lord?" Then the angel ... answered and said to me, "*This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of hosts. Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain! And he shall bring forth the capstone with shouts of "Grace, grace to it!"*" Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, "*The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple; his hands shall also finish it; then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent Me to you*" [Zech. 4: 4-9]

A power outage (also known as power cut, power failure, power loss, or blackout) is the loss of the electricity supply to an area.¹ It could be due to several factors that affect power generation and distribution. While some countries may take for granted uninterrupted supply of electric power all the time, some others, especially newly industrializing countries can experience several hours of daily power-cuts in almost all cities and villages. Consumers (individuals and corporations) are forced to invest heavily in back-up generators. Therefore, a power outage is not what one can tolerate if it becomes the normal way of life.

However, in our relationship with God, some of us are experiencing almost permanent spiritual power outage! With good qualifications and excellent credentials, we still find it difficult to obtain or retain employment or earn good pay. In business and investments, we end up with raw deals. In marriage, we choose wrong partners and end up in distress or divorce. Do you know why?

In this week's study, God has told us that it is not by our might or power but by His Spirit that we can make it. So, if you have near- permanent spiritual power outage, where do you expect to generate the electricity for victory? Are you substituting human "generators" to deal with your spiritual power failure? Do you want to know how to solve your spiritual power supply problems? Today's study is for you!

¹ 'Power outages', From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Power_outage

1. Background: God's Spirit enables Zerubbabel to complete the reconstruction of the temple in spite of stiff opposition

In fulfillment of the word of God by the mouth of the prophet Jeremiah [**Jer. 25: 12**], God stirred the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to let the Jewish exiles return to Judah after 70 years in Babylon [**Ezra 1: 1**]. The first group of returnees was led by Zerubbabel who later became the governor of Judah [**Hagg. 1: 1**]. King Cyrus gave them the mandate and the means to reconstruct the temple in Jerusalem and to restore worship there. However, over time, especially after the death of Cyrus, local political opposition in Jerusalem rallied support from King Artaxerxes to completely stop the work by force of arms [**Ezra 4: 23**].

It was at that stage that God sent word to Zerubbabel and his men through two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah [**Ezra 5: 1**]. If the people were going to rely on their might or power, they would fail to complete the reconstruction work. However, if they relied on the Spirit of God, they would triumph. God assured them, saying, "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple; his hands shall also finish it" [**Zech. 4: 6-9**]. The Lord "stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel ... and the spirit of all the remnant of the people, and they came and worked on the house of the Lord, their God." Zerubbabel and his men put their trust in God and, against all odds, they completed the work during the reign of King Darius [**Hagg. 1: 14-15**]. That confirms the word of God through the prophet Hosea that He would have mercy on the house of Judah and that He would save them not "by bow nor by sword or battle, by horse or horsemen" but "by the Lord their God" [**Hos. 1: 7**].

That is a good "electrical" connection to have and to hold. In our relationship with God, we can easily suffer power outages if we do not anchor our desires and actions on God 's purposes and plans for us. After all, He gave us our endowments and opportunities, might and power *strictly* for His own ends [**Deut. 8: 17-18**].

2. Overcoming spiritual power outage

For every decision that we are about to make, we have two main choices: do it our way or God's way. Using our way means trusting human judgment. It means making our choices and bringing God in later to "ratify" our decisions. When He refuses because they may go against His purposes for our lives, we turn around to accuse Him of not answering our "fervent" prayers! In the world, we may blame power outage on the power supply company or natural disasters, like storms or fire. In a spiritual power outage, however, we are *invariably* responsible for it! When we sin against God, He simply switches off!

Here are examples of how we can channel our might and power to overcome or avoid a spiritual power outage:

- a) *By not relying on natural endowments*

Some of us believe that our natural endowments can take us quite far. For example, some people from majority groups may have inherent advantages over those from minority groups, all things being equal. Beautiful girls may believe that they have advantages over their less endowed colleagues. Taller people may tend to look down on the rest of us. However, God does not look at physical features but the heart when He assesses us [1 Sam. 16: 7]. To rely solely or mainly on your natural endowments is to suffer a spiritual power outage.

A good example is the story of Goliath the Philistine giant that was killed by the teenager David. Towering over nine feet (3 metres) in height and carrying a spear whose head weighed some fifteen pounds (6.8 kilogrammes) [1 Sam. 17: 1-7], there was no match for him in the army of Israel. So, each day, he came forward to challenge Israel to combat “and all the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him and were dreadfully afraid” [v. 24]. However, David that was not yet qualified to enter the army, being under twenty years of age, came forward to accept the challenge! The youngest son of Jesse, God had just chosen him as a future king in place of the disobedient Saul. Soon after the prophet Samuel had poured the anointing oil on his head, “the Spirit of the Lord came upon David *from that day forward*” [1 Sam. 16: 13].

David was too small to fit into Saul’s armour or to carry his sword. So, he moved towards the giant carrying only a sling and five smooth stones [1 Sam. 17: 40]! As he moved towards Goliath, the giant looked at the unarmed youth with disdain, and promised to feed David’s flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field. David said to him, “You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin [might and power]. But I come to you *in the name of the Lord of hosts*, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.” David put a stone in his sling and struck the giant in the forehead. The stone pierced through his forehead and he died. David ran forward and used the giant’s sword to cut off his head and the Philistines fled [vv. 42-51]! David made up for his small stature with the Spirit of God.. Goliath relied on his great size to his destruction.

b) *By not depending on position power*

Many of us aspire to higher positions because we believe that they will confer on us power and influence to do and undo. We can command obedience from subordinates that we can reward or punish. We are in charge of resources (financial and non-financial). The centurion told Jesus, “I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes; and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it” [Matt. 8: 9].

In reality, however, position power cannot win us victories *all the time*. First of all, there are people that we can neither punish nor reward; and yet, we need their resources or cooperation for our success. Secondly, even if we have the power to attack and conquer, we may not be able to defeat a more powerful enemy. Thirdly, even if we have the military or financial might to conquer others, we can still fail because we do not know what power such people may be relying upon.

Let us illustrate this case with two examples. In one case, more powerful nations, Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir, surrounded small Judah to battle against Jehoshaphat. He feared and gathered all the people of Judah (men, women and children) before the house of God in Jerusalem, fasting and praying, [2 Chron. 20: 1-5]. After confessing his and his people's sins, he said to God, "We have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, *but our eyes are upon You.*" Immediately, the Spirit of God came upon Jahaziel, a Levite, and he prophesied, saying, "Thus says the Lord to you: 'Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, *for the battle is not yours but God's*'" [vv. 6-15]. In deed, the following day, Jehoshaphat put praise singers in front of the army, singing, "Praise the Lord, for His mercy endures forever." As the enemies heard the praise songs, they turned on one another until they were all completely destroyed [vv. 16-23]! Without throwing a spear, Jehoshaphat won a comprehensive victory against more formidable forces. It was not by his might or power but by the Spirit of God.

The second example is the case of Gideon (Jerubbal) who was going to battle with an army of thirty-two thousand men against the Midianites in the days of the judges. The Lord told him that they were too many "*lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.'*" God told him to send home the fearful and afraid. Twenty-two thousand men went home and ten thousand remained [Judg. 7: 1-3]! The Lord said that they were still too many. He asked Gideon to bring them to the water and set them into two groups, depending on whether they lapped the water like a dog or went down on their knees to drink water. Only three hundred men lapped and God told Gideon, "By the three hundred men who lapped I will save you and deliver the Midianites into your hand" [vv. 4-7]. With only three hundred men, Gideon killed one hundred and twenty enemy forces and won a decisive victory [Judg. 8: 10]! That was not by his military prowess but by the Spirit of God.

c) *By not relying on mystical powers*

At creation, God gave man the authority to have dominion over His creations [Gen. 1: 28]. It was Adam that named every living creature and whatever name he gave, God accepted [Gen. 2: 19]. Therefore, the great strides that man has made in all fields of human endeavour are in line with God's

blessings for him. However, some people have carried it too far, to the extent of playing God and denying the existence of the one and only true God. So, in the search for meaning, some people have taken to magic and sorcery which they try to use to dominate the rest of us. They may succeed for a season until they come face-to-face with the Spirit of God.

Take the case of Pharaoh’s magicians when God sent Moses to get the Egyptian king to let His people go. Before meeting the king, God had said to Moses, “I have made you as God to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet” [Ex. 7: 1]. In other words, God put His Spirit on Moses to pre-arm him against the then strongest king in the world. When Moses turned his rod into a serpent, Pharaoh’s magicians replicated the feat, and when Moses turned the Nile water red, the magicians did the same thing [vv. 10-11, 20-21]. The contest continued until the plague of lice on people and beasts. The magicians tried to replicate it but they failed.. Then, they turned to Pharaoh and said, “This is the finger of God” [Ex. 8: 19]. From that point on, it became a one-way contest! It was not by the might and power of Moses but by the Spirit of God that was on him.

During Paul’s ministry at Ephesus, the power of God was so strong on him that even handkerchiefs or aprons that were taken from his body were sent to the sick to heal them of their diseases, and evil spirits went out of them [Acts 19: 11-12]. On seeing that, some Jewish exorcists tried to replicate it by saying to a man with an evil spirit, “We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches.” The seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were the main culprits. The evil spirit answered and said, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you?” The man in whom was the evil spirit pounced on and overpowered them! The news went around quickly and those that practised magic collected their books and burnt them “in the sight of all,” and the value ran into fifty thousand pieces of silver [about US\$6.4 million] [vv. 13-19].

From the forgoing, we can conclude that no matter the circumstances we may face, believers who have the Spirit of God can show evidence of signs and wonders, blessings and God’s favour [Acts 9: 31; Acts 19: 20]. The kingdom of God is not about eating and drinking but “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” [Rom. 14: 17]. Since we are not fighting against flesh and blood but against evil and wicked spiritual forces [Eph. 6: 12], it follows that the weapons of our warfare have to be spiritual, not carnal [2 Cor.10: 4]. Just as we cannot store our food or operate electrical gadgets without power supply, we cannot successfully store the word of God in our hearts and live by it during a spiritual power outage.

3. Conclusion: Reconnect fast!

Whenever you find your spiritual electric current running low or failing, do the following::

- Quickly pay your due bills!

When the power authority cuts off your supply due to your fault, they will not reconnect until you pay your bills, including a reconnection fee. In like manner, whenever God cuts off His presence from you, it is *your responsibility* to reconnect to Him. Examine your relationship with Him and fellow human beings. Do it candidly- from the position that you are wrong. Offer apologies (where appropriate) to those you have offended and forgive those who have hurt you, with or without their apologies. Confess to God and pay your bills, such as tithes and vows. Do restitution (where necessary).

- Remain in compliance

Remember that the power generating plant is still working at the time that you have an outage at your end. In most cases, it is your connection that is faulty. In like manner, the Spirit of God is always there but He only works with those who are properly connected to Him. Since you can only call Jesus Christ Lord by the Holy Spirit [**1 Cor. 12: 3**], and those who are led by the Spirit of God are called the sons of God [**Rom. 8: 14**], you cannot live God's plan for your life without Him. Therefore, be and remain in compliance by having the Holy Spirit as your travelling companion.

The Holy Spirit is your spiritual Internet provider [**Jn 3: 3, 5**] and GPS (Global Positioning System) navigator in the vehicle of your life journey [**2 Cor. 5: 7**]. When He is on your side, then your earthly might and power will receive a spiritual boost and you will achieve beyond all expectations in all that you do. Isn't that wonderful?