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MARK STIBBE

Our Mission in Britain III

Mark Stibbe outlines an evangelical charismatic approach to mission. It is described with reference to the apostle Paul's description of his ministry amongst the Thessalonians 'not only with words but also with power'. This partnership of word and power, logos and dunamis, is seen as a key feature of the ministries of both Jesus and Paul. Evangelism that brings together proclamation of the Gospel and a demonstration of God's power is appropriate to the culture of our post-modern times.

Not only with Words but also with Power

We've heard from representatives of the open and conservative rivers, now it's time to consider the Charismatic contribution to the church's mission in the Britain. It is a real honour and privilege to make a contribution on this subject. In addition, to be in a place where we are encouraging unity is incredibly important especially if that unity is not just polite political ecumenism, but rather that is something that has a goal. The greatest goal that we could be focused on is the proclamation of the Gospel to the Nation.

I've called my paper, 'Not only with Words but also with Power'. This phrase is taken from one of my favourite passages.

1 Thessalonians 1:4-10

We know that God loves you, dear brothers and sisters, and that he chose you to be his own people. For when we brought you the Good News, it was not only with words but also with power, for the Holy Spirit gave you full assurance that what we said was true. And you know that the way we lived among you was further proof of the truth of our message. So you received the message with joy from the Holy Spirit in spite of the severe suffering it brought you. In this way, you imitated both us and the Lord. As a result, you yourselves became an example to all the Christians in Greece. And now the word of the Lord is ringing out from you to people everywhere, even beyond Greece, for wherever we go we find people telling us about your faith in God. We don't need to tell them about it, for they themselves keep talking about the wonderful welcome you gave us and how you turned away from idols to serve the true and living God. And they speak of how you are looking forward to the coming of God's Son from heaven – Jesus, whom God raised from the dead. He is the one who has rescued us from the terrors of the coming judgement.

What I am interested in is verse 5, where Paul says: 'when we brought you the good news it was not only with words but also with power'. Here is a summary of

the Apostle Paul's methodology of mission. I believe what we have got here is an integrated approach of both verbal presentation and visual demonstration. When I look at Paul I see a combination of preaching the logos – the message – with signs of God's dunamis or power, and it looks to me like this was the normative way in which Paul presented the Gospel, especially among the Gentiles.

So in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 Paul writes :

Dear brothers and sisters, when I first came to you I didn't use lofty words and brilliant ideas to tell you God's message. For I decided to concentrate only on Jesus Christ and his death on the cross. 3 I came to you in weakness – timid and trembling. And my message (LOGOS) and my preaching (KERYGMA) were very plain. I did not use wise and persuasive speeches (LOGOS), but the Holy Spirit was powerful among you (DUNAMIS). I did this so that you might trust the power of God (DUNAMIS) rather than human wisdom.

Here Paul clearly talks about an integrated approach of LOGOS and DUNAMIS, with demonstrations of power being the PROOF of the message. This seems to have been a particular feature of Paul's mission to the Gentiles, as we can see from Romans 15:19.

I have won them over by the miracles done through me as signs from God – all by the power of God's Spirit. In this way, I have fully presented the Good News of Christ all the way from Jerusalem clear over into Illyricum.

So what we have got here is a complete approach to mission that is charismatic as well as cognitive. It involves demonstrations of the Spirit's power as well as a verbal and reasonable presentation of the truth of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Consider what it might mean to have demonstrations of the Spirit's power in our mission. I want to look first of all at the evidence of power:

The meaning of power

What did Paul mean by power? Now some argue that demonstrations of power, refers first of all to the extraordinary transformation wrought by the Gospel on sinful human beings, in other words conversions. That is unquestionably part of what Paul meant – in 1 Thessalonians 1:5 the grammar seems to read as follows 'the Gospel came to you in power, that is, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction'. Power here refers to the miraculous conversion of the people alienated from God and opposed to the truth, and in that sense other evangelical approaches besides the charismatic are not devoid of power when it comes to mission.

I was reflecting earlier with Vaughan Roberts. We are both from the same school, Winchester College, and both products of a revival, a mini revival, in that school during the 1970's. During that time I remember my conversion very, very vividly. I was walking down a street in Winchester. It was about 11pm at night and little voice inside of my heart said 'Mark Stibbe, if you died tonight where would you stand before the judgement seat of Christ?' Now there was nothing overtly charismatic at all about that particular time in the school's Christian Union life, but I can tell you it was incredibly powerful. It was powerful enough to make me run to the maths teacher's house, knock on his door late at night and be let in. I

knelt in his front room and gave my life to the Lord Jesus Christ. My life was so radically transformed and turned around that today 25, 26 years on I am still following Jesus Christ. I owe my ministry, as it were, to that moment when walking down the street far away from a church, far away from any preacher, the Holy Spirit apprehended my heart, and powerfully addressed the issue of where my life was going. So I know that it doesn't have to be charismatic to be potent.

At the same time conversion is not the whole story in these power texts, if I may call them that, in the Pauline literature though certainly it is probably the major part of the story. The primary goal of mission is the transformation of human lives; that people should be radically born again of the Spirit of God. In 1 Thessalonians 1:5 Paul may well have also meant miracles as well, not just miracles of conversion, but healings, prophetic revelations and insight that were startling in their accuracy to the extent that people were saying 'You've been reading my mail! How on earth did you know that?' These were all sorts of demonstrations of the power of the Spirit that those of us who are charismatics would put under the *charismata* – the gifts, the grace gifts of the Holy Spirit. So I believe that the business of mission from a charismatic perspective needs to involve the exercise of the *charismata*, the spiritual gifts, in our witness to the world.

Beloved to all charismatics are lists of the grace gifts particularly, in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. These of course are not exhaustive, as I have shown in my book *Know Your Spiritual Gifts*¹. However they do give an idea of the kind of pluriform spiritual phenomena the charismatic would expect to see, not only in the worship place gathered together with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, but also in the work place. When we look at the ministry of Jesus we see that prophecy, healing miracles and other gifts were operative in his life as he ministered, seeking and saving the lost. So, prominent among the gifts that can be used in mission today, and would be incredibly powerful, would be the grace gifts of healing and prophecy.

Let us begin with healing. I believe that our post-modern culture today is extremely open to the whole dynamic of spiritual healing. If you look back at the September issue of the UK version of the Reader's Digest, the whole of the central section of that issue was about the power of prayer, how prayer affects healing and the healing process. This is very revealing about our culture. I believe that praying for lost people to receive healing in Jesus' name is one of our most under used, but most powerful, resources in the Body of Christ. In my own life I have been on a learning curve in the last 6 or 8 months. I have been asking the Lord Jesus to help me to be bold and daring with those who are not Christians when I meet them; on the streets, in the pubs in the work place and so on. When somebody says to me 'I'm sick', I pray for them that they would get healed. We have been praying very much for this integration of *logos* and *dunamis* because we believe the culture is very open to this means of sharing the Gospel. Our nation maybe decreasingly Christian but increasingly spiritual. Even though we may be finding it hard to get people into church we need to get out to where the people are and daring to be praying for people to encounter God's love and God's power.

1 Mark Stibbe, *Know your Spiritual Gifts: How to Minister in the Power of the Spirit*, Zondervan, 2000.

Prophecy is another significant gift in this context. Of course from a charismatic perspective we might understand this differently from some conservative evangelicals because we believe that prophecy did not die out in the first generation of the Church of Jesus Christ. Prophecy and teaching are distinguished in the NT as spiritual gifts and ministries. We understand prophecy as spiritual revelation given directly and immediately, often with a future dynamic, but not necessarily or exclusively so. Again, to be able to operate in the gift of prophecy in the context of evangelism is an extraordinarily potent resource.

In summary, from a charismatical evangelical perspective I think that mission involves both *logos* and *dunamis*, and that *dunamis* refers not just to the evidences we see when people are converted but also to the grace gifts of the Holy Spirit, the charismata, like prophecy and healing,

The relevance of power

Our culture is post-modern not modern. Post-modernism as you know represents a movement away from objectivity to subjectivity, from rationalism to experientialism, from unity to multiplicity. We need to present the Gospel in a way that is relevant to our culture, which does not mean watering down the message of the Cross. If our culture has become much more open to experience of the transcendent then if we present a Gospel just in a purely rationalistic and verbal way, when the cultural is experiential and visual, then we have missed the mark. I believe in a marriage of truth and experience of word and spirit, Scripture and the power of God I see those things integrated in Paul, but also in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Professor Gordon Fee puts it this way:

'If the church is going to be effective in our postmodern world, we need to stop paying mere lip service to the Spirit and to recapture Paul's perspective: the Spirit as the experienced, empowering return of God's own personal presence in and among us...'²

In other words, not just to talk about the presence and the power of the Spirit, but actually to welcome the presence and the power of the Spirit, together with manifestations of the Spirit according to 1 Corinthians 12, which are the charismata, the gifts of the Spirit.

In a culture like ours we need not just a logocentric methodology, but also one that involves the power of the Holy Spirit evidently at work. It isn't either or it is both. So I believe in an integration of the Gospel and the gifts in our outreach and in our gathered context as a Church when we are altogether. We believe in having the charismata handled and stewarded, wisely and well within the public gathered context. We also believe in releasing people as individuals in the private, scattered context on Monday morning. This means daring to pray for the sick in the work place or daring to listen to what the Father is saying about work colleagues, so that the gifts of the spirit are being taken out of the nave into the neighbourhood. This is one of my major visions.

2 Gordon Fee, *Paul, the Spirit and the People of God*, Hodder & Stoughton, London 1997.

There has been a tendency towards faddism in the last 20 years in many charismatic churches. Healing, prophecy, deliverance, intercession, cells etc., have been fads which have become the centre of the constellation of priorities and so a church becomes defined by its healing ministry or its exercise of prophecy. When these become the centre of a church's vision and values, the proclamation of the Gospel becomes at best peripheral. We have to make the journey from consumerism to evangelism, the journey from 'feed me' to 'feed them'. The gifts of the Spirit exist to serve the proclamation of the Gospel, not replace it.

The context of power

In 1 Thessalonians 1:5-6. Paul writes:

And you know the way we lived among you was further proof of the truth of our message. So you received the message with joy from the Holy Spirit in spite of the severe suffering it brought you. In this way, you imitated both us and the Lord.

Paul is writing about living his life there and being rooted in community I suppose we call it 'servant evangelism': living amongst the poor and the needy, the bruised and the broken-hearted to bring the Father's love to them day by day through life-style evangelism. I think the context in which God's power can be seen is a context of suffering. God's power is demonstrated in human weakness and suffering: suffering is the primary context for the demonstration of God's glory, weakness is the primary context for the manifestation of God's power.

The power of God is vital for the going forth of the Gospel in our Nation, but I also believe that weakness, suffering, hardship may very well be the primary context in which we will see most of God's power released. I am reminded that one of my favourite essays by James Bradley on 'Martyrdom and Miracles'. He reminds us that the Holy Roman Empire was turned upside down by the Gospel not just through miracles, but through the way in which Christians under persecution stood with courage for their faith in Jesus Christ. It is with cracked pots that the precious treasure of God's light and power shines so radiantly.

So finally, I want to plead with everyone to seek for more of God's power. More of God's power in our mission so that this would not just be programme-driven or but done in our own strength, but be a combination of *logos* and *dunamis*. Mission needs to be charismatic as well as cognitive. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4:20 in one of his very rare kingdom sayings:

'For the kingdom of God is not just fancy talk it is living by God's power'

It is not just *logos* it is *dunamis* too. In the ministry of Jesus it was both the message and the miracles, the words and the works, that showed people the newness of life that God alone can bring. So I am praying for a church in our nation that will operate in both, and not either or.

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