

(Power From on High) 5. the Holy Ghost in the Gospel of John

by A.B. Simpson

The Holy Spirit is the source of spiritual life, joy, and power in the Gospel of John, and is the key to understanding the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Scripture: John 7:37

Topics: "Abundant Life", "Holy Spirit"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the transformative power of the Holy Spirit as revealed in the Gospel of John, illustrating how Jesus, through the Spirit, offers believers a new life and the ability to overflow with blessings to others. He explains that the Holy Spirit is given to believers not just for personal regeneration but to empower them to serve and bless others abundantly. Simpson uses the miracle at Cana to demonstrate that true joy and divine life come from sharing the Spirit's gifts, urging Christians to be vessels filled to the brim with the Holy Spirit and to actively pour out that blessing into the world. The sermon calls for a life of obedience and service, highlighting that the more we give, the more we receive from God.

Transcript

"In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified." John 7: 37-39.

In the first seven chapters of the Gospel of John, we have a very striking progressive unfolding of the doctrine of the Holy Ghost; first, in abstract statements of truth, and then, illustrated in a very significant and beautiful miracle.

I.

First, we have the Holy Spirit in relation to the Lord Jesus. In John 1: 32, we see the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and abiding upon Him, and in John 3: 34, we are further told that God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him.

Up to this time all men had received the Spirit by measure; that is, they had received some of His gifts, influences, and power; but Christ received the Spirit Himself in His personal presence and immeasurable fullness, and since then the Spirit has resided in the world in His boundless and infinite attributes.

Christ first received Him as a pattern for His followers, and then gave Him forth to them, from His own very heart, as the Spirit that had resided in Him, and that comes to us softened by His humanity and witnessing to His person.

Therefore we read in the next place not only of Christ's receiving the Spirit, but of Christ's giving the Spirit. In John 1:33, the great forerunner says of Him, "The same is He which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost." It is Christ that baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. It is through Him we receive the Spirit. It is He who "hath shed forth," as the Apostle Peter says, the power from on high, and the Spirit of Pentecost.

This is the peculiarity of the Holy Ghost as He comes to us in the New Testament age. He comes not only from the Father, but especially from the Son, and through the Son, and He comes to us as the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ.

II.

We next see the Holy Ghost in relation to the believer; first, He is presented to us as the Spirit of regeneration. In John 3, verses 5 and 6, Christ says, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit."

The very first experience of the Christian life is to receive the new heart from the Holy Ghost. The natural man is unable even to see the Kingdom of God, and is powerless to enter. The Holy Ghost creates in us a new life and a new set of spiritual senses altogether, through which we discern, understand, and enter into the life of God and the spiritual realm. "As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name; which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

Next, we see the Holy Ghost in His deeper, and personal indwelling in the heart. In John 4: 14, Christ said to the woman of Samaria, "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life." This is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It is much more than regeneration. It is the personal incoming of the Spirit Himself, bringing not a cup of water, but a well of water, and establishing in the heart the fountain of life, so that we are henceforth dependent, not upon each other, but upon God only, for the source of our life.

Again in John 7: 37, we have a still stronger expression to describe the interior life of the Holy Ghost in the heart; "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink." Drinking of the Spirit is more than receiving the Spirit. It is possible for us to receive the Spirit and have Him, and yet not use Him nor drink from the flowing fountain as abundantly as we might.

The Apostle in 1 Cor. 12: 13 uses the same figures where he says, "By one Spirit are ye all baptized into one body, . . . and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." To use the old figure, it is the bottle in the ocean and the ocean in the bottle. It is possible for us to be in the Spirit, and yet not be receiving the Spirit as fully as we need. Drinking is the habit of faith, an exercise of our spiritual senses which constantly renews and quickens our spiritual life, refreshing us and filling us, so that we are glad to pour out our full

vessel in service for others.

Then this receiving of the Spirit needs, on our part as well as on Christ's, the using and giving forth of the Holy Ghost to others. And so we read in the next verse, "He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive." This is the outflow of the spiritual life. This is the evidence that we are filled, because we cannot hold it longer, and now occupy ourselves in imparting the blessing to others. Like Ezekiel's river, it is flowing not in, but out, pouring in streams of blessing through the dry and desert places of life. As soon as our life becomes positive, unselfish, and outflowing, it becomes unspeakably magnified; so that what was a well, in the heart, has grown to rivers of blessing, in the life devoted to God and expended in blessing the world.

The river suggests the idea of fullness, magnitude, and abundance; spontaneous, free, and overflowing, it does not need to be pumped but flows of itself for very fullness. It is the service of a glad, unselfish and loving heart.

God does not want anything that has to be pressed from an unwilling giver. The prayer that is offered God from a sense of duty, the work that is done just because we have to do it, the word that is spoken because we are expected to be ministers and to be consistent with our profession, are dead, cold, and comparatively worthless. True service springs from a full and joyful heart and runs over, like the broad and boundless river. Like the river, too, it runs downward into the lowest places and aims to reach the saddest, hardest, and most hopeless cases. And, like the river, it is a perennial and ever flowing spring, running on amid the changing scenes around it, flowing through the whole course of life, and saying, like the beautiful streamlet as it glides along, "Men may come, and men may go, but I go on forever."

This is the power of the Holy Ghost. It makes us simple, sweet, exuberant, full-hearted, and enthusiastic for God, and our work, and our words are the overflow of a life so deep and full that it brings its own witnesses, and it makes others long for the blessing that shines in our faces and speaks in our voices and springs in our glad and buoyant steps. And it is not merely a river, but rivers. It runs wherever it can find a channel and blesses every life that it touches on its way. Is God thus using us, and has He thus filled us with the Holy Ghost until the fullness overflows?

It is not necessary that we should be always preaching. Indeed, sometimes we are looking too far off for the service that God expects of us. Just at hand we might often find the opening and the channel which would bring blessing to some heart that God has brought into our life, to prepare us for future blessing to a wider circle.

An anxious, earnest Christian woman was crying to God for service and wondering why she was tied up in her home and unable, like other women, to go out and reach a broader place. Her bright little girl was playing beside her and calling in vain to the preoccupied mother to help her with her little doll, which had lost a finger or a garment, and which to her was the central object of life.

Again and again she came to the mother with her little trouble, and the mother, fretted and worried with her own spiritual need, pushed her off, and, at length, rather harshly sent her away and told her not to bother her, as she was busy about higher things. Wearied and disappointed, the little one went off alone into a corner and sat down with her little broken doll and cried herself to sleep.

A while afterward, that mother turned around and saw the little rosy cheeks covered with tears, and the little wrecked doll lying in her bosom, and then God spake to her, and said, "My child, in seeking some higher service for Me, you have broken a little heart of Mine. You wanted to do something for Me. That little child was the messenger I sent, and that little service was the test I gave you. He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in more, and he that is unfaithful in the least is unfit for the greater."

The mother learned her lesson. She picked up the little lamb in her arms and kissed her awake; then she asked God and her baby to forgive her, and began from that hour to pour out the love of Christ on every object that came in her way. As she became faithful to do the things nearest at hand, God widened her sphere until the day came when, standing among her sisters, leading the on to higher service and speaking to hundreds and thousands of her fellow-workers, she told the story of her experience, and the lesson by which she learned that God does not need our great service, but simply that we should meet Him in the things that He brings to us, and that we should everywhere be channels of blessing and love.

So let our lives be filled, and then emptied throughout the channels around us. Let us come to Him, and drink and drink again, and yet again, until our hearts are so full that we shall go out to find the sad, the sinning, and the suffering and comfort them with the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

This was the story of the Master. This must be the story of the disciple. We receive that we may give, and only as we give, shall we continue to receive; the more abundantly we impart, the more richly shall we be filled with all the fullness of God.

III.

Let us now look at a beautiful object lesson of this double truth in the second chapter of this blessed Gospel. It is the miracle of Cana of Galilee. The evangelist tells us that this was the first of Christ's miracles, and it must have had a special significance. He also tells us that it was a miracle which manifested forth His glory, and this undoubtedly suggests to us that there was some deep lesson back of this miracle, which made it worthy to occupy a place right in the beginning of the deeply spiritual teaching of this wonderful gospel. Indeed, it is a kind of parable and symbol of the whole truth which we have been endeavoring to unfold from the direct teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ in the passages which we have quoted.

1. We see the failure of our natural life, joy, and love, in the exhausting of Cana's wine. Beautiful, indeed, is the bridal scene with its fair and fragrant blossoms, the freshness and beauty of youth, the vigor and nobility of young manhood, the sympathy of innumerable friends, and the bright and sunny hopes and prospects of future happiness. But oh, how soon the vision fails! How quickly the goblet of pleasure is drained, and how often the serpent is left in the dregs, and all that remains is a memory more bitter because of the joy that has turned to sadness!

Alas for life, if this were all! But it is just when the natural fails, that the divine begins. It is just when the old creation dies, that the new creation rises. It is just when Cana's wine is exhausted, that Jesus of Nazareth appears. And now we see in this exquisite miracle the very truths we have been endeavoring to unfold.

2. Next we have the filling of the vessels. The Master's command is, "Fill the waterpots with water to the brim." They were just earthen vessels, waterpots for ordinary use; but they were empty and clean, and all that was necessary was to fill them with pure water. They represent these vessels of our human lives,

earthen vessels; but if they are empty vessels and offered to the Master, and if they are filled to the brim with the Holy Ghost, of which water is ever the type, then something will surely come to pass.

They must be full to the brim. A whole heart must receive a whole Christ. The Holy Ghost does not take us by halves, nor will He give Himself by halves. It is the fullness which makes the overflow.

3. Next comes the other and nobler side of the miracle. The filling is the smallest part. What next? "Draw out now, and bear to the governor of the feast." Begin to use the water, and lo! it becomes wine.

Oh! how clear and plain the lesson! It is blessed to receive the Holy Ghost, but it is more blessed to impart Him. And the only way you will know that you have received Him, is by beginning to give Him. You must go forward like the servants of the parable, in faith, and draw out before you see the miracle; but as you bear it to the guests, lo, it becomes wine, and it rises to a higher quality. Both are types of the Holy Ghost, but the wine is the higher. The water speaks of cleansing and fullness, but the wine tells of joy, and love, and life divine.

When we are receiving the Holy Ghost we are only cold water Christians, but when we are pouring forth His fullness in holy service we are drinking of the heavenly wine, and we are made partakers of the Master's own divine and ineffable joy.

It is exactly the same idea expressed later in the rivers of living water, running out, and running over; but it is more than the river. It is the joy and the gladness that turns all life into a marriage feast and a joyful song. Even the world itself is forced to admit, like the ruler of Cana's wedding, that the best wine has come last.

Oh, that we might so live and so minister that men would recognize, even as he, the higher qualities and value of the blessing that He brings! All around us are hearts and lives where the wine of earth has failed, God help us to bring them the heavenly cup, and the divine life of the Lord Jesus Christ, until this poor, starving world shall recognize that we have something better than they, and shall be made hungry by our benignant faces and our overflowing joy.

Now, in conclusion, how are we to receive this blessing? Let us hearken to the message of Mary. "Whatsoever He saith unto thee, do it." It comes to us through some step of obedience to the Master Himself. He will show you the way, and as you obey Him step by step, you will enter into the joy of your Lord. He will interpret every experience and more than realize every anticipation.

But next, you must not forget the other command, "Fill the water pots with water; fill them to the brim." Leave no vacant place in the soul. Hold back no part of your life from Him. Yield a whole heart and fill it with a whole Christ.

And then finally, above all else, go forward and use the gift of His love. "Draw out, and bear to the governor of the feast." Take the life that He has given and use it to comfort the sorrowing, save the lost, help the discouraged, and minister in the name and grace of your blessed Master; as you go forth, the Holy Ghost will go before you, and will work through you, and lead you on from strength to strength, and will multiply you one hundred fold, until, like Ezekiel's vision, the trickling streamlet will become "water to the ankles," "water to the knees," "water to the loins," "water over head, a river to swim in," a torrent of blessing and of power, with the trees of life on either shore, the leaves of healing, and the gladness and the glory of Paradise restored all along your way.

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