

The Spirit During the Mission of the Messiah

by G. Campbell Morgan

The Spirit played a crucial role in Jesus' mission as the Messiah, empowering and commissioning Him for His work, and preparing for a larger dispensation.

Scripture: Isaiah 61:1, Matthew 7:11, Luke 4:18-19, Luke 11:13, John 7:37-39, John 14:16-17, John 16:13, John 20:22, Acts 1:8, Acts 2:4

Topics: "The Holy Spirit", "Empowerment for Mission"

Description

G. Campbell Morgan emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit during the mission of the Messiah, illustrating how the Spirit spoke through the prophets and prepared the way for Jesus. He highlights the significance of Jesus' baptism, where the Spirit descended upon Him, empowering Him for His ministry of preaching good news, healing, and liberation. Morgan notes that Jesus taught His disciples about the Holy Spirit, revealing God's willingness to give the Spirit to those who ask, yet they did not fully grasp this until after His resurrection. The sermon culminates in the understanding that the Spirit's work is essential for the continuation of Christ's mission through His followers. Ultimately, the Spirit, who was present in Jesus' life, is now available to empower believers for their own mission.

Transcript

DURING the days of Israel's decay the Spirit, through the prophets, had spoken of the coming One. Hope had been preserved in the heart of the nation through the visions of future glory contained in the wonderful words that had been uttered by the messengers of the King. Even these voices had been silent for nearly four hundred years, from the days of Malachi to those of John the Baptist. During that period, however, a small remnant had kept the hope of Israel brightly burning, by loyalty to the principles of government which had been so often declared.

At last the long silence was broken by John, who announced the advent of One Whose distinguishing work should be that of baptizing men with the Holy Spirit and with fire. To the vast crowds that gathered upon the banks of the Jordan he said: / indeed baptize you with water; but there cometh He that is mightier than /, the latchet of Whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. As the Spirit bore a close relation to Jesus as perfect and unfallen Man, so also did He to the office and work of the Messiah. At the commencement of His ministry the Lord claimed as His own the sacred anointing of the Holy Spirit for the fulfilment of His mission:--

The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,

Because He anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor:

He hath sent Me to proclaim release to the captives,

And recovering of sight to the blind,

To set at liberty them that are bruised,

To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. . . .

And He began to say unto them, To-day hath this scripture been fulfilled in your ears.

The Spirit brooded over the chaos of old, the power of God in creation; the Spirit had been present through all the history of the race, coming specially upon men, for special purposes as God willed. Now that the new dispensation was to be ushered in, and the new order initiated, as the Master began that work which He has not yet completed, but towards the completion of which He is still working, He claimed that the Spirit rested upon Him, as the anointing for His mission. The Lord's view of His own mission is revealed in this quotation. He is anointed To preach good tidings to the poor: To proclaim release to the captives, And recovering of sight to the blind, To set at liberty them that are bruised, To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. Standing in the synagogue, reading the words of the prophet, claiming their fulfilment in His own Person, He initiated that new age described by the prophet as the acceptable year of the Lord.

The whole of this preparatory work of Jesus Christ was accomplished under the guidance and in the power of the Spirit. The anointing took place at His baptism: Now it came to pass, when all the people were baptized, that, Jesus also having been baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended in a bodily form, as a dove, upon Him, and a voice came out of heaven, Thou art My beloved Son; in Thee I am well pleased.

Immediately afterwards He was led by the Spirit in the Temptation experiences: And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led by the 'Spirit in the wilderness.

Following this, He entered upon His public work in the power of the Spirit: And Jesus returned in the 'power of the Spirit into Galilee.

There is a clearly marked sequence here. Anointed by the Spirit, full of the Spirit, led by the Spirit, in the power of the Spirit--thus He entered upon the specific work of His Messiahship.

During the exercise of that Messiahship He uttered words to His disciples upon one occasion which demand special attention: If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him? If it were possible to occupy the actual position of the men who heard these words, it would also be possible to understand how startling a statement it was. They knew what the Scriptures of the Old Testament had to teach about the Holy Spirit. They thought of Him as coming on special men for special work, by the direct giving of God apart from human seeking. The thought of asking for the Spirit was absolutely foreign to the whole economy of the past. The circumstances under which Jesus made this statement must be carefully noted. The disciples had watched Him at prayer, and, being attracted by something in His attitude or appearance, said to Him: Lord, teach us to pray. He immediately gave them a perfect pattern known as the Lord's Prayer, but more correctly spoken of as the disciples' prayer. He then proceeded to teach them, by analogy, how that God

was always waiting to answer importunate prayer. He used a contrast to teach the truth, showing how a friend who is unwilling to rise from rest to supply the necessity of another will do so if that other be importunate enough and continue his asking. He summed up the whole thought of importunate prayer in those words that pulsate with meaning: Ask--seek--knock.

He then led them along another line of thought concerning prayer; and using the relationship of a father to a child as illustration, He declared God's willingness to give the best gifts to men: If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" Their request to be taught how to pray resulted in their hearing the most startling announcement concerning spiritual matters that had ever fallen upon their ears. They were told that if they asked of God with importunity, and understanding that God would give good gifts only, then they might have the Holy Spirit.

This statement must have so staggered these men as to surprise them almost into inaction; for it is evident that they never asked for the Spirit, and therefore never received Him in answer to their own asking. This text is perpetually quoted as having a present-day application. This is due to a failure to draw the line of distinction between the various phases of the Master's mission. The words were spoken to a handful of Jewish disciples gathered around the Jewish Messiah. He was unveiling to them a great secret in all God's dealings with men--that God would give the Holy Spirit to men who asked, if they did so according to the law of prayer laid down. There is not, however, any evidence that they ever had the Holy Spirit, until that Spirit came along another line of communication. Before the Master left them He said: I will make request of the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter. . . the Spirit of truth.

On the previous occasion He had said in effect, Ask, and ye shall receive the Spirit; but they did not ask, and did not receive. They never truly saw Christ, nor understood His mission, nor entered into the deep underlying secrets of His life, until after the Spirit had come upon them in answer to His asking. Our Lord here revealed to them the will of God, the attitude of the Divine heart, the preparedness of the Father to bestow the wondrous gift of the Holy Spirit upon them, but there is no evidence whatever that they ever asked or ever received in answer to their own asking.

One of the most difficult passages to translate, perhaps, in the whole of the Gospel of Luke is the one which reads: I came to cast fire upon the earth; and what will I, if it is already kindled?- But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished." The if marks the sigh of desire. A paraphrase of the passage may contribute to its elucidation: I came to cast fire upon the earth; and what will I, If Would that it were already kindled! The old acceptance of the verse is most incorrect: I came to cast fire upon the earth; and what will I, if already I find that fire kindled? The passage is a soliloquy? Jesus turned from teaching His disciples, and it seems as though He lifted His eyes and looked out upon the necessities of men, and said: I came to cast fire upon the earth; and what will I? If it were already kindled! or, Would that it were already kindled! Then He proceeded: I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished! As though He had said it was impossible for Him to cast this fire, as He desired, until He had Himself passed through the baptism that awaited Him.

This scattering of fire refers to the baptism of the Holy Spirit which John had already predicted: I indeed baptize you with water; but there cometh He that is mightier than I, the latchet of Whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

In the Acts of the Apostles is chronicled the Master's own reference after His Resurrection to that statement of John: John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence.

In connection with the baptism of the Spirit at Pentecost it is recorded: There appeared unto them tongues parting asunder, like as of fire; and it sat upon each one of them. Fire was the symbol of the Spirit, purifying and energizing. Jesus took up the thought of John: John baptized with water, He with fire.

In the light of these passages, it is evident that the fire referred to is that of the Spirit which Christ was waiting to scatter upon the earth, and He declared that until His Passion-baptism was accomplished He was unable to fulfil this purpose.

Jesus, anointed by the Spirit, led by the Spirit, full of the Spirit, was waiting to communicate to other men that fulness which resided in Himself, but He was unable to do this until the Cross was an accomplished fact.

That reveals the character of the years of our Lord's ministry. He was laying foundations, laying them deep and strong, upon the righteousness of God in His own life; He was preparing for the tremendous transactions of the Day of Pentecost, and for all that should follow therefrom. Filled with the Spirit, led by the Spirit, He looked upon men with eyes all lit by tender love, and longed to communicate to them this gift of an indwelling Spirit, yet was unable to scatter the fire until His atoning work was done.

During these years of public life our Lord gave teaching concerning the Holy Spirit which has only been thoroughly understood and valued since He passed through the gateway of death into the larger life beyond. All that it is necessary for men to know about the operation of the Spirit in this dispensation Jesus Christ Himself declared; and this teaching occupied a most important place in His ministry. It is found wholly within the Gospel of John, and may be divided into two parts --that which is indirect and suggestive, and that which is direct and positive. The indirect and suggestive teaching of Jesus fell from His lips upon different occasions--once to the woman of Samaria, once to a company of Jews, once to the crowds of people who thronged the streets at the Feast of Tabernacles. The direct teaching of Jesus was given, to His disciples only, in the Paschal discourses. These were the last utterances of Christ to them, and contain a perfect statement concerning the work of the Spirit.

In the indirect teaching of Christ, the first instance is that of His conversation with the woman of Samaria: Jesus answered and said unto her, Every one that drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of -water springing up unto eternal life. The woman had no clear understanding of the depth of that message, nor had those who heard it from her lips. In common with other words of Christ, it his only come to be understood in the light of the Spirit's dispensation. The water which He gives is the living water of the Spirit, perpetually springing up in the soul of man unto eternal life.

Every reference made in this chapter--and this is not an accident, it is the result of careful analysis of the whole teaching of Christ--is taken from the writings of Luke or of John. There is scarcely anything recorded by Matthew or Mark of the relation of the Spirit to Christ in His work. Matthew views Christ purely as a Jewish Messiah, and necessarily omits the glory of the larger outlook. Mark views Him as a Servant, and sees Him stripped of all supernatural power; but Luke, the Gospel of the universal Saviour, and John, the Gospel of a Divine Lord and Master, contain the revelation of the secret forces that made His ministry.

Another statement is contained in a discourse to the Jews directed against materialistic conceptions of communion with God. He declared that it is only in the realm of the spiritual that this communion can be maintained: / am the Bread of life: he that cometh to Me shall not hunger, and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst.

The third and last was uttered on the great day of the feast, and is a beautiful statement concerning the ministry of the Spirit and the relation of man to that ministry : 'Now on the last day, the 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.' Then follows John's inspired exposition of those words: But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believed on Him were to receive: for the Spirit was not yet given; because Jesus was not yet glorified.

For this He was preparing by doing a work which would arrest the attention of men and call for their faith; and He declared that men responding to that demand, and exercising faith in Himself, should enter into a new region of life, in which their own personal thirst should be quenched, and out of them flow rivers of living water. All this is condensed truth about the Spirit, uttered by Christ during His life, and only fully understood in the light of subsequent events.

The Paschal discourses are too important to be dismissed hurriedly, and therefore will be considered in following chapters. It will be sufficient here to state their nature. The One of Whom the Spirit was to speak, spoke of the Spirit, by the Spirit. The Spirit's mission is to unfold the glories of the Christ; and men know this to be the case, because the Christ unfolded the glory of the Spirit. There is the most wonderful communion between Son and Spirit revealed in this teaching.

The last point of importance in this connection is the prophetic breathing of the Spirit upon men by Jesus Christ: Jesus therefore said to them again, Peace be unto you: as the Father hath sent Me, even so send I you. And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Spirit: whose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them; whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained. The place these words occupied in the work of Jesus must be considered, if they are rightly to be understood. He had risen; the Passion-baptism was over. He could no longer say: / have a baptism to be baptized with: and how am I straitened I He had been baptized with that baptism, He was no longer straitened in the same sense, but He had not yet ascended into the presence of God. Not until He had actually taken His place in the heavenlies, in the double right of life and death, standing for Himself in the power of a perfect life, and for us in the power of an atoning death--not until He had represented men in the presence-chamber of the King, could He shed forth that great gift of fire which He had come to scatter upon them.

The former treatise I made, O Theophilus, concerning all that Jesus began both to do and to teach, until the day in which He was received up, after that He had given commandment through the Holy Spirit unto the apostles whom He had chosen. For forty days He tarried, giving them commandments, and it is very wonderful to notice that the risen Christ worked in the energy of the Spirit. He gave these men their commandments through the Holy Spirit; and, among other things, He stood in their midst and breathed upon them. The explanation of that act is to be found in what He said immediately before: As the Father hath sent Me, even so send I you. And when He had said this, He breathed on them. He declared the law of continuity of service, that these men were to pick up the threads of the work that He had Himself been doing, and were to weave them into warp and woof, until the whole perfect fabric should be completed. As the Father hath sent Me, even so send I you. He had been sent anointed with the Spirit; and now He

breathed on His disciples, and said: Receive ye the Holy Spirit.--As the Father hath sent Me, even so send I you. He had been sent by the Father in the power of the Spirit, and He sent them in the power of that self-same Spirit.

That this breathing of Christ was a prophetic act is proved by the subsequent facts. Before He ascended He told them that they were not to go, but to tarry until they were endued with power from on high. It was a prophetic breathing. His Passion-baptism was over; He stood among His followers--the little band chosen to carry on His victories and do His work; and, looking at them, He said: As the Father hath sent Me, even so send I you. . . . Receive ye the Holy Spirit. It was a typical act, suggesting the power in which they were to go to the work He committed to them.

The whole subject may thus be summarized. The day of new power and of new light was prepared by the ministry of the Son of God and the Son of Man. The light and the glory of the Gospel were created in the mysterious energy, suffering, and agony of the life of the God-man. The Spirit Who brooded over the chaos, Who had visited men, Who had always been interested in men, and Who had ever carried out the work of God among men, came upon Christ, dwelt in Him, energized Him, and prepared, in His Person, for a larger dispensation. Through His life the Spirit prepared for that death of mystery, as the result of which the Spirit should pass into the life of men, for pardon, purity, and power.

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