

THE SPIRIT AND THE WIND

“The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it but cannot tell from where it comes and where it goes. So is everyone that is born of the Spirit.”

John 3:8

OUR Savior’s words are infinite. Some men use a great deal of language to convey a very little meaning. But our Savior compacts boundless instruction into short sentences. If all the preachers in Christendom were to preach from this one verse for the next twelve months they would still leave much of its teaching undeveloped.

These words remind us of the Holy Spirit. Is it not to be feared that we have lost a great deal of power in our lives because we have not been sufficiently mindful of the power of the Spirit of God? When our Savior compared the Holy Spirit’s operations to the movements of the winds did He not show us how absolutely needful they are, how indispensable they are? Imagine a world without winds! Why, we should soon stagnate into death. Without wind what would be the use of the great highway of the sea? A thousand mischiefs would follow—infinity more than we could calculate—if henceforth the air had no motion and there were no living, breathing winds.

Without the Spirit of God, the scene were infinitely worse. O ship of the Church, how could you speed over the sea of time? The trees of the forest would no more clap their hands. Stagnation of progress would take place. The dry bones of the valley would lie unquickened and even the odors of the rose of Sharon would no more be shed abroad. We must have the Spirit of God. Even as the Sun of Righteousness brings healing beneath His wings so does the Holy Spirit bring all that is living to us all. Let us adore the third Person of the Trinity in Unity and think of Him often, with deep reverence in our spirits, so that we never go to work, nor to prayer, nor even to the singing of a hymn without seeking that He would Himself be the life of the holy engagement.

With the view of bringing out the Truth about the Spirit of God, I shall first mention certain minor lessons contained in the text. Then, the lesson of the mystery of the Holy Spirit. And thirdly, the mystery of the man that is born of the Spirit. For it is not merely said, “so is the work of the Spirit.” But “so is everyone that is born of the Spirit.” The child of a mystery is himself a mystery.

1. First, there are CERTAIN MINOR LESSONS TO BE TAUGHT HERE. The Spirit of God is like the wind. Note well that His operation is unexpected. The wind blows where it wishes so that you know not what wind to expect. In this land, especially, we can never tell what wind will blow tomorrow. A few days ago it was the south-west and it brought a rapid thaw. But the next morning it was nearly north and a frost was upon us. We may well put vanes upon our public buildings, for without them we could never tell from the day of the year or the season of the year, from what quarter the wind would come. I feel thankful when I remember that, like the wind, the Holy Spirit blows where He wishes for I cannot tell where next He may operate.

Perhaps tomorrow He may save a prince—it would be an unexpected thing. Another day He may save some great backslider, who knows? He may graciously work upon the more degraded part of the people or He may deal with certain of our great merchants and bring them to His feet. He that knows the work of the Holy Spirit must have learned to expect the unexpected. The last thing expected in Jerusalem was that Saul of Tarsus would be converted. But he was converted. And you may now hope that the most violent opposer of the Gospel may become a trophy of its power. And might not that same wind blow on you who come here simply to be a spectator of solemnities—willing to hear what the preacher has to say but not at all desirous to be affected by it?

How often have we seen men and women the least likely, the very first to be impressed by this Divine power? O heavenly Wind blow where the feeble faith of Your people has scarcely dared to think that You can come, and where every influence has operated to shut You out! The movement of the Holy Spirit is like the wind, too, because it is inexplicable. Who can tell me why the wind was north-west on Monday, or why it was east on Friday? There are persons who profess to tell us but they use great words which mean nothing. As a general rule, science signifies bamboozlement, riding upon hypotheses, or mystifying with long words.

The explanations of modern savants are often more difficult to understand than the fact which requires the explanation. Now I cannot tell why the Spirit of God works here or there. Why was England favored with the Gospel when other nations, who were in advance of Britain in civilization, were left without it? Why is it that the islands of the sea seem almost always to accept the Gospel, while continents are left in darkness? "He gives no account of His matters"—take that for your answer. It is all that He will give you.

The Holy Spirit moves like the wind for suddenness and freeness. None of us can raise the wind. We use the expression, but the fact is beyond our power. The wind comes without our call or direction. Who shall tell whether tomorrow we shall wake up with a thaw or a sharp frost? The wind springs up just where it likes and moves just where it pleases. And it is so with the Holy Spirit. I grant you that prayer such as that of Elijah can chain the winds and stay the clouds, or unseal the bottles of Heaven and bring down the rain—but it is because the Lord wills it. Still, the Spirit is absolutely free and He moves as the dew which tarries not for men, neither waits for the sons of men.

If He wills to break forth tomorrow across this country with His Divine energy He cannot be stopped. If, in answer to the prayers of His people, He should be pleased to work in India or in China, as I trust He will, we shall soon see how free is the blessed Spirit to bring glory to God. God may be glorified thereby. The Spirit is like the wind—His movements are not to be accounted for.

And, next, the Holy Spirit is like the wind because He is absolutely sovereign. Preachers scarcely like to tell their congregations nowadays that God gives His Grace according to His own good pleasure. I learned, when I was a boy, that the chief end of man was to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. But I hear now, according to the new theology, that the chief end of God is to glorify man and enjoy him forever. Yet this is the turning of things upside down. The glory of God is still the chief end of the world's existence. And whether men will have it so or not, the Lord has settled it. "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."

So that, "it is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs but of God that shows mercy." No voice is more glad than mine to preach the free salvation of God to them that perish. But God has not sunk His sovereignty in His bounty. Jehovah still reigns and the wind blows where it wishes and not where man wills that it shall blow. Further, the Spirit of God is comparable to the wind because of the variety of His operations.

The wind does not blow at all times alike. Soft and mild, it brings us summer heat. Rough and rugged, it makes us bind our cloaks about us as the sharp breath of winter chills us to the bone. The Spirit of God works differently at different times, according to the necessity of the case and according to His own will. For He blows as He wishes as well as where He wishes. Sometimes I have almost trembled to pray for the power of the Holy Spirit. I remember a Brother praying that we might be filled with the Spirit of God and I was but very young then but ventured to ask him whether he knew what he meant.

He looked at me with astonishment when I added, "Where He comes He is the Spirit of judgment and the Spirit of burning." It is a blessing, no doubt, to be filled with the Spirit. But who may abide the day of His coming? Like the Lord Jesus, He is as a refiner's fire. We might have had the Spirit much more copiously had we been able to bear His wondrous work within us. I know He is a Comforter but I know also that His fan is in His hand. He is a searcher as well as a healer, a destroyer of evil as well as a creator of good.

Thus you see that His working is not always of one kind. One gracious soul has gone out weeping, broken-hearted—the Spirit of God had wounded the heart. Another has gone forth rejoicing in full salvation—it was the Spirit of God. One day the Word of God comes like a hammer and a fire—at another time it drops like the gentle dew from Heaven upon the parched heart. All these are works of the same Spirit. Judge not, I pray you, so as to deny this humble hope or that trembling trust to be of the Spirit, for the Spirit works all good things.

Even in the same individual the Spirit of God works very differently at different times. One day He makes us leap like young harts upon the mountains. And then Naphthali is a hind let loose—the Spirit of God is on him. At another time the true Prophet is shut up and cannot come forth. He is filled with sighs and groans which cannot be uttered and the Word of the Lord is as a pent-up fire in his bones. But the Spirit of God is as much in the silence as in the eloquence—possibly more so—for the flesh may go with the first but it is the Spirit which works in the second.

Let us not judge ourselves to be abandoned by the Spirit of God because after autumn eventides, in which we sat under our own vine and fig tree, we have had wintry nights of darkness, leafless and fruitless. Don't you know that the Spirit of God is that Wind which passes over the green field when the flowers are all in bloom and the grass withers and the flower fades because the Spirit of the Lord blows upon it? Surely the people are grass. The withering work of the Holy Spirit is as necessary for our eternal benefit as when the Spirit, at another time, opens the buds of those fair flowers which shed their perfume at the feet of love.

Note then, that like the wind, He varies in His modes of manifestation. And note, again, the Spirit of God is like the wind because His operation is manifest. “The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound thereof.” Yes, we cannot see the wind but we can hear it. So may you hear the Spirit of God. When you hear the Scriptures and read the Word, the Spirit of God speaks to you. It is well to hear the Spirit whisper in the ear of conscience when He presses home the Truths of God and makes the mind to feel its power. Sweetest of all is it when the newly-opened ear hears the Spirit of God speak to it with its own peculiar, “still small voice.” Then it is sweetly true. “You hear the sound thereof.”

My dear Hearers, do you know anything about this? Has the Spirit of God so worked in you that you have recognized the sound? It is a manifest work—have you felt it?

In all respects, the work of the Spirit of God remains mysterious and wonderful. Men cannot tell us much about the wind but when the wind rises to a tornado and carries everything before it, we see what the wind can do. I would to God that we had a cyclone of the Holy Spirit! What a sweep it would make of a great many rotten Church buildings which now stand upright! Many a magnificent pile would fly before it like dust and chaff from the summer's threshing-floor! But the Spirit of God, whether He works so gently that He scarcely disturbs the tear that hangs in the eye like a dewdrop on a blade of grass, or whether He comes with such tremendous force that the most stubborn infidelity is swept away before it—in either case it is very marvelous—for He is God and He works after the Divine manner.

I am half inclined to pause here and say, “For the rest of our time let us worship in the presence of this mighty God, who does His pleasure and works the will of the Most High forevermore.”

II. But I must take you on—in the second place to consider THE GREAT LESSON OF THE MYSTERY WHICH IS TAUGHT US BY THE SYMBOL OF THE WIND, WHICH IS THE TYPE OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD.

Now dear Friends, concerning the wind, our Savior says, “You can not tell from where it comes and where it goes.” Yet we know that it comes from the east, or the south and passes on its way and it goes towards the west. The text cannot mean that we do not know the direction of the wind, or the direction in which the Spirit of God is moving, for we do know that. We know that He is a power that makes for righteousness and for eternal life. But then, we do not know where any wind begins to blow. No one can explain where the north wind commences.

The heathen had an idea about the wind rushing out of a cave, or of its being let loose from a bag. We know that this is but a dream. We cannot imagine a place where the wind starts on its journey. And we do not know when the Spirit of God begins to work in any person's heart, or even in our own. Some persons are troubled because they cannot tell the day of their conversion. Let them not be troubled about that question. Even those who know that on such-and-such a day they took a decided step, and the light burst in upon their spirit, will find, if they look back, that a great deal of gracious experience went before their decision to prepare their minds for the final step.

We do not know how early the Divine processes begin within a soul. Our very parentage has something to do with it. That we were born of such-and-such godly parents is a part of the arrangement of Divine Grace. I do not think you can tell, with regard to yourself, when the first gracious thought was sown in you when first you lived towards God. You can tell when you first perceived that you believed in God. But there was an experience before that. You cannot put your finger upon such-and-such a place and say, "Here the east wind began," nor can you say, "Here the Spirit of God began to work on me."

Neither can we always tell what was the first process. Does a man pray first or believe first? If he prays without faith he will not be heard. Which comes first, repentance or faith? A repentance that has no faith in it is no repentance. A faith that has no repentance with it is no faith. These gracious products are like the spokes of a wheel, they all move at the same time. When the wheel of spiritual life moves we cannot tell which grace in it moves first. The processes of Divine Grace may, in your case, begin with a downcast soul and in the case of another person they may begin with a lifting up of holy faith. We cannot tell from where it comes.

Neither can we always tell the exact means of our receiving the Spirit. You say it was by this minister's preaching. Be grateful. But before that sermon an unknown person did a deal of plowing within your heart. How would the one have sown had not the other plowed? Many a man who thinks he has never done any good will find out at the Last Great Day that he did much more than he fancied and that he accomplished an essential part of the work though it remained hidden. "You can not tell from where it comes."

Equally mysterious is the other point as to "where it goes." We know which way the Holy Spirit points but you can not tell where He goes—that is to say what special fashion His work will take in the person who has received it tonight—whether it shall go towards a deeper and deeper sense of sin and the life shall be most noticeable for its repentance. Or whether it shall rise into a higher and a higher view of Christ and the life shall be noticeable for its joyfulness. You can not tell where it goes. How far the Grace of God can go in any man is impossible for us to say. Let none of us begin to measure by ourselves and say, "Nobody can be holier than I am. Nobody can have more Divine Grace than I have."

Brothers and Sisters, you yourself can obtain ten times as much Divine Grace as you now have. You are but a babe yet. You do not know what the stature of a man in Christ may be. The boy converted but a week ago may become a Moffat or a Livingstone. The girl who is now a trembling Believer, you can not tell what a Mary or Hannah, God may make her. You can not tell where the Spirit goes. When Martin Luther's father first taught Martin about Christ and prayed for him, he could not tell how the Spirit of God in him would work and how the whole world would be the better for the miner's son. "You can not tell where it goes."

Oh, if some of you get the Spirit of God just now, I cannot guess what it will make of you! There are wonderful possibilities sleeping within the breast of every man who receives the Spirit of God. Should the Spirit work in you, you would not know yourself in the sanctifying experience of a thousand years time. And what are a thousand years? Project yourselves beyond the growths of time to that grandest of all growths, when "we shall be like He, for we shall see Him as He is." Even then you have not reached the end of the Divine way. You can not tell where it goes.

You are yet to outstrip the angels. Jesus your Lord is the First-born and you are to be one of the First-born's many Brethren. Measureless advancement lies before you. I have opened the window—look through and contemplate with the eye of faith what yet may come of the entrance of

the Grace of God into your heart! You can not tell where the north wind stays its course, nor where the east wind falls asleep. Is there such a place? You have not seen where it begins, nor can you guess where it shall end, yet even when you are in Glory the life which the Spirit imparted to you here shall be your life.

III. The last few minutes must be occupied with THE LESSON CONCERNING THE MYSTERY OF THE MAN HIMSELF—"So is everyone that is born of the Spirit."

The Spirit-born man is a mysterious person. Only those who are like he is can pretend to know him. Even they do not know him. And what is more wonderful—he does not know himself. Perhaps no man is more amazed at him than the godly man himself. He has experienced a change but he cannot describe it to you. He knows the things in which he is changed—the effects of the Spirit—but how it was worked he knows not.

As no man can tell anything about his first birth, so neither can he describe his second birth—it remains a mysterious operation even to him who has passed through it. "Oh," said one to me, "Sir, either the world's quite altered, or else I am." So, indeed, it is—everything is changed. The world itself is altered and in some things it seems altered for the worse. We find we are not at home in it, though we used to be. We should not know ourselves if we met ourselves. And when, unfortunately, we do meet ourselves, we fall to quarrelling with ourselves—for we have no greater enemy anywhere than our own selves.

It is a strange thing that we should have to say so—but the greatest paradox that can be is a regenerate man still in a body which remains under corruption. The man is a strange mixture of old and new, nature and Grace. While he is himself a mystery to himself, his sorrows are a mystery to other people and they cannot make out why he is sad. His business prospers, his children are about him, he has good health and yet he is mourning. And if they hear him say, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" They reply, "This is a wretched man, though he ought to be the happiest of beings!"

From the best man in the world we hear the deepest sigh that he is not better. The man that thanks God who can give him the victory is the man who groans in the battle. The world does not understand this. It cannot make out how we can fight and yet be at peace. How we can be torn asunder, yet never torn away from the Cross. How we can live by dying and die every day in order that we may never die at all. The Believer's riddle is a very hard one. He is a mystery as to his sorrows and his joys—these are secrets with which the world cannot intermeddle. This is a mysterious business—a man in poverty, rich. A man in affliction, rejoicing. A man alone, yet in the best of company. The unregenerate cannot comprehend this singular person.

The man that lives near to God is a mystery, more or less, at all times. He is not all he desires to be, nor all he hopes to be but he is far beyond what he ever expected to be. Strange impulses move him at times so that he does things which he cannot himself account for. He feels that he is bound to do them, and he does them, and has the warrant of having done rightly in the result of what he does. I am sure that every child of God who walks in the light of His countenance will understand what I mean when I say that we are moved in singular ways. So moved that we ourselves hardly know how. But so moved that Wisdom is justified of all her children.

Strange is the power of the Holy Spirit over the heart of the regenerate. And this is made manifest in the singular changes of which they are the subjects. God's own people know what it is to sound the deeps and outsoar the heights. Up, up, up, where the callow lightning first spread his wings, we mount in ecstasy. And then down we go, down into the abysses where sea-monsters have their dens—such strange beings are we when under the highest power. The wind sighing through the trees, or singing amid the cords of an Aeolian harp is not more strange than the experience of a genuine child of God.

I know what it is to run before Ahab's chariot with Elijah and I am afraid I know what it is to faint under the juniper and need to be awakened that I may partake of food, that I may go forty days in

the strength thereof. The Christian man does not understand himself but his varying experiences go to make up that sickness of self and fondness of Christ which is so desirable.

I will give you two words you cannot explain, just to show the mystery of our manhood. "Spirituality"—now then, turn to your dictionaries and see whether they define it. You know what it is—you cannot tell me and I shall not tell you, because I cannot. There is another word—"unction." You know what it is. If you hear a sermon that has none of it you know what the absence of it is. But when an unction rests upon the Word, can you tell me what it is? I cannot tell you. But I pray that I may have that unction myself. Of course, the ungodly make jests upon the expression, because it has no meaning to them. Yet the children of God delight in it.

Do not expect the world to understand you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. But inasmuch as Christ has chosen you out of the world, do not expect that the world will know you. If it knew Him not, who was so much better and clearer than you, how should it know you? And you, my dear Hearers, who are not born again, to whom all this must seem a foreign language—I pray you to believe that there is something which you need to understand and that in order to understand it you must be born again.

May the Spirit of God make you feel, experience, and enjoy this mystery by causing you to know the power of that gracious word, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life"—if you believe in Jesus, if you look to Him, if you trust Him—if the Holy Spirit has given you faith, He has begun His work in you and He will carry it on and perfect it to the praise of His glory forever. May it be so, for Jesus' sake. Amen. LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON

DSufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," and therefore I will not repeat any of the fears which naturally thrive around such a shock as I have received. The doctor says, "You may be well soon of that knee but do not deceive yourself by trying the brain till it has had a fair chance of recovery." I know what he means and I feel I must submit to be away from my delightful work till I can begin again without absolute folly.

The good points of the whole matter are very many. The name of the Lord is prayed for the splendid way in which, in the sorrowful absence of both pastors, all the Church has stuck to its work and the blessing has not ceased. I am cheered and comforted by this. And I am sure that the Lord has some great design of love to answer by the heaped up coals of fire which have burned upon our hearth. He is good. As surely good in the dark as in the sunlight. All is well. Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him. Perhaps by the way of bodily weakness may come increased spiritual strength. Love unbroken, from your suffering pastor, C. H. S. Mentone, January 17, 1889.