

‘But by My Spirit’

C. H. Spurgeon

Spurgeon's text is Zechariah 4:6

I. “Not by might...”

II. “nor by power...”

III. “But by my Spirit, says the Lord of Hosts.”

And now to conclude lest I weary you. While the progress and advance of the church are to be accomplished neither by the collected might of armies, corporations, or churches, nor by the separate exertions of individuals, neither by the might of learning nor of eloquence, yet both the objects are to be accomplished BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD.

I was thinking as I was preparing this sermon what a magnificent change would come over the face of Christendom if God were suddenly to pour out his Spirit as he did on the day of Pentecost. I was then sitting down meditating, and I thought, 'Oh, if God would pour his Spirit upon me, would I not leap from this place where I am now sitting, and on my knees begin to pray as I never did before, and would I not go next Lord's Day to a congregation who would feel a solemn awe about them?' Every word I spoke would strike like arrows from the bow of God, and they themselves would feel that it was 'None other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!' (Gen. 28:17) Thousands would cry out, 'What must I do to be saved?' (Acts 16:30), and go away carrying the divine fire till the whole of the city would be kindled.

And then I had pictured to myself what would come over all the churches if they were in the same condition, and all the people received that same Spirit. I had seen the minister from Monday morning till Saturday night doing little or nothing - delivering his weekly lecture, attending one prayer-meeting, and thinking himself hard worked. I saw him suddenly start up from his couch, and go round to all the sick of his chapel, and I observed how he delivered a short address of comfort to the sick, with such holy gravity and such divine simplicity, that they lifted their heads from their pillows, and began to sing, even in the agonies of death.

I thought I saw others of them girding up their loins and crying, 'What am I doing? Men are perishing, and I am preaching to them only three times a week and am called to the work of the ministry.' I thought I read of all those ministers going into the open-air to preach the next Monday night; I thought I saw all of them flying, like angels fly, to-and-fro across this land.

And then I thought I saw the deacons all full of the Spirit too, and found them, with all their powers, doing everything in the fear of God. I found those who had been lording it over the congregation and acting like rulers no longer seeking to be like Diotrephes; I saw the heavenly influence spread over every mind; I saw the vestries too small for the prayer meetings, and I saw the chapel crowded, and I heard the brethren who year after year had prayed the same monotonous prayer, break forth in earnest burning words. I saw the whole assembly melted in tears when the pastor addressed them, and urged them to prayer, and I heard the brethren one by one as they rose up speak like men who had been with Jesus, and had learned how to pray. They prayed as if they had heard Christ pray in Gethsemane, that prayer which was such as no man prayed.

And then I thought I saw all those members and those deacons, and those pastors going out into the world. And, oh, I pictured what preaching there would be, what distributing of tracts, what

giving to the needy, what holy living! And then I thought I already heard every house uttering its song of evening praise, and every cottage at its morning worship, sending up its prayer to heaven. I thought I saw inscribed upon every ploughshare, 'Consecrated to God,' and on every bell worn by the horses, 'Holiness to the Lord' (Zech. 14:20).

And then I thought I saw the different denominations rushing into each others arms; I saw the bishop doff his mitre, and clasp his dissenting brother and call him friend, and invite him to preach in his cathedral. And I thought I saw the stiff puritanical dissenter casting away his hatred of conformity, and receiving the Church of England brother to his heart. I thought I saw baptized and unbaptized sitting at one table. I saw Presbyterian, Wesleyan, Independent, and Quaker agreeing in one thing – that Christ crucified was all – and clasping one another's hands. Yes, and then I thought I saw the angels coming down from heaven. And it was not long before I finished my reverie by hearing the shout – 'Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah, the Lord God omnipotent reigns!' It was a reverie, but it will be true some day. By the Spirit of God all this will be accomplished. How and by what means I do not know, but I know the great agency must be the Holy Spirit.

And now, dear friends, let me counsel you. The great thing the church lacks in this time, is God's Holy Spirit. You all draw up plans and say, 'Now, if the church were altered a little bit, it would go on better.' You think if there were different ministers, or a different church order, or something different, then all would be well. No, dear friends, it is not there the mistake lies, it is that we need more of the Spirit.

It is as if you saw a railway engine on a track, and it would not go, and they brought along a driver and they said, 'Now, that driver will just do.' They try another and another. One proposes that such-and-such a wheel should be altered, but still it will not go. Some one then bursts in amongst those who are conversing and says, 'No, friends; but the reason why it will not move, is because there is no steam. You have no fire, you have no water in the boiler: that's why it will not go. There may be some faults about it; it may need a bit of paint here and there, but it will go well enough with all those faults if only you get the steam up.'

Now people are saying, 'This must be altered, and that must be altered'; but it would go no better unless God the Spirit were to come to bless us. You may have the same ministers, and they will be a thousand times more useful for God, if God is pleased to bless them. You may have the same deacons; they will be a thousand times more influential than they are now, when the Spirit is poured down upon them from on high. That is the church's great lack, and until that need is supplied, we may reform, and reform, and still be just the same. We need the Holy Spirit, and then, whatever faults there may be in our organization, they can never materially impede the progress of Christianity, when once the Spirit of the Lord God is in our midst.

But I urge you, be earnest in praying for this. Do you know that there is no reason why I should not have preached so that every soul in the place was converted, if God the Holy Spirit had been pleased to manifest himself. There is not any solitary shadow of a reason why every soul that has been within the sound of my lips should not have been converted by something said today if God the Holy Spirit had been pleased to bless the word.

Now I will repeat, there is not a humble Primitive Methodist, nor a poor insignificant preacher of any sort on earth, who, if he preaches the truth, God the Spirit may not make as useful in conversion as any of the great departed saints who are now before God's throne.

All that we need is the Spirit of God. Dear Christian friends, go home and pray for it; give him no rest until God reveals himself (Isa. 62:6-7). Do not delay, here you are, do not be content to go plodding on in the same old way as you have done; do not be content with the mere round of formalities. Awake, Zion; awake, awake, awake! Put on your strength, Jerusalem, wake up from your slumbers, rise up from your lethargy, and cry to God and say to him, 'Awake, awake! Put on your strength, oh arm of the Lord, as in the ancient days' (Isa. 51:9). Then, when he does it, you will find that it is not by might, nor by power; it is by God's Spirit.

And now I conclude with a very brief address. Sinner, unconverted sinner, you have often tried to save yourself, but you have often failed. You have, by your own power and might, sought to curb your evil passions and licentious desires. With you I lament that all your efforts have been unsuccessful. And I warn you, it will be unsuccessful, for you can never save yourself by your own might. With all the strength you have, you can never regenerate your own soul; you can never cause yourself to be born again. And though the new birth is absolutely necessary, it is absolutely impossible to you, unless God the Spirit does it. I pray for you that God the Spirit may convince you of sin, and if you are already convinced, I urge you to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, for he has died for you, has washed away your sins; you are forgiven. Believe that; be happy, and go on your way rejoicing; and may God Almighty be with you until you die.

This excerpt is taken from C. H. Spurgeon's Sermon No. 149: 'Independence of Christianity'.