

ELIJAH, AND THE SECRET OF HIS POWER

By

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CHAPTER TWENTY

FILLED WITH THE HOLY GHOST

(Luke 1:15, 17)

WHAT may not one man do in one brief life, if he is willing to be simply a living conduit-pipe through which the power of God may descend to men? There is no limit to the possible usefulness of such a life. There, on the one hand, is the oceanic fullness of God; here, on the other, are the awful need and desolation of man, guilty, weak, bankrupt, diseased: all that is required is a channel of communication between the two; and when that channel is made and opened, and kept free from the silting sand, there will ensue one great, plenteous, and equable flow of power carrying the fullness of God to the weary emptiness of man.

Why shouldst thou not be such a channel, my reader?

There is a splendid illustration of this in the life of Elijah, of which we are now taking our farewell.

For more than a hundred years the tide had been running strongly against the truth of God. Idolatry had passed from the worship of Jeroboam's calves to that of Baal and Astarte, with the licentious orgies and hideous rites which gathered around the ancient worship of the forces of Nature. The system was maintained by an immense organization of wily priests, who had settled down upon the national life like a fungus growth, striking its roots into the heart. The court was in its favor. The throne was occupied by an effeminate man, the weak tool of his unscrupulous and beautiful wife - the Lady Macbeth of Jewish history.

The Lord's altars were thrown down; His prophets silenced and in hiding; His faithful worshipers a mere handful, whose existence was so secret as to be known only to Him. The lamp of truth had been overturned; and there was only a tiny spark of light feebly burning, to show where once the light of true religion brightly shone.

Into such a state of things Elijah came, unarmed, from his native trans-Jordanic hills; a highlander, unkempt, unpolished; unaccustomed to the manners of a court, or the learning of the schools.

Withal, a man weak where we are weak; tempted where we are tempted; of like passions with ourselves.

And at once the tide began to turn.

- The progress of idolatry received a decisive check.
- The existence and power of the Lord were vindicated.
- New courage was infused into the timid remnant of true-hearted disciples.
- Altars were rebuilt;
- Colleges were opened for the training of the godly youth;
- A successor was appointed; and
- An impetus given to the cause of truth, which was felt for many generations.

Perhaps the greatest tribute to Elijah's power with his contemporaries is in the fact that his name and work stood out in bold and clear outline for nine hundred years after his death; surpassing the whole school of Jewish prophets, as the Jungfrau rears her snow-clad peaks above the giants of her chain; and furnishing a model with which to set forth the power and courage of the forerunner of our Lord.

The Holy Spirit, speaking in Malachi, the last of the prophets, could find no better symbol of the pioneer of the Christ than to compare him with the famous prophet who, centuries before, had swept to Heaven in the chariot of flame: "**Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord come.**"

The bright angel Gabriel, standing, four hundred years after, amid the ascending incense of the holy place, found no easier method of conveying to the aged priest the type of the wondrous son that was to gladden his old age, than to liken him to Elijah: "**He shall go before His face in the spirit and power of Elijah.**"

Whenever a notable religious movement was stirring through the land, the people were accustomed to think that the prophet of Carmel had again returned to earth; and thus the deputation asked John the Baptist, saying, "**Art thou Elijah?**" and when a mightier than John had set all men musing in their hearts, as the disciples told our Lord, many of the common people believed that the long expectation of centuries was realized, and that Elijah was risen again.

It was commonly believed that no other of woman born was great enough to precede the Messiah, and that he would anticipate His advent by an interval of three days, during which he should proclaim, in a voice heard over all the earth, peace, happiness, and salvation.

All these things are evidences of the towering greatness of Elijah's character and work.

With all the failures and mistakes to which such natures are prone, he was a great man, and did a noble work. And the secret of all was to be found not in any intrinsic qualities, but in the fact that he was filled with the Holy Ghost.

Let us pause here, and ask ourselves if we can give our thoughtful assent to this statement. If we cannot, we must count much of our time and labor in these chapters wasted; for our one aim has been to establish this point. But if we can, then, as we close these chapters of stirring sacred

biography, we may resolve that we will never rest until we too are filled with the Holy Ghost. We will not rest satisfied in being imitators merely; but we will seek to be filled with the same Spirit, that He may work again through us the marvels of the past.

If I may venture so to put it, God is in extremity for men who, thoughtless for themselves, will desire only to be receivers and channels of His power. He will take young men and women, old men and children, servants and handmaidens, in the waning days of this era, and will fill them with the self-same Spirit whose power was once reserved for a favored few.

Besides all this, the positive command has never been repealed which bids us be **“filled with the Spirit”** (Ephesians 5:18). And we cannot reiterate too often that those who feel themselves bound to strict temperance in respect to wine by the former clause, should feel the latter one to be equally imperative.

Moreover, what God commands, He is prepared to do all that is needful on His side to effect. Then when, like John the Baptist, we are filled with the Holy Ghost, like John the Baptist we shall go **“before His face in the spirit and power of Elijah; to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to walk in the wisdom of the just; to make ready for the Lord a people prepared for Him.”**

I. THIS FILLING OF THE HOLY GHOST WAS THE CHARACTERISTIC OF THE CHURCH

On the day of Pentecost they were all filled with the Holy Ghost - women as well as men; obscure disciples as well as illustrious apostles; and to guard against the leakage which is, alas! too common to us all, they were filled and filled again; those who are described as filled in Acts 2:4, are spoken of as filled again in Acts 4:31.

- New converts, like Saul of Tarsus, were bidden to expect this blessed filling.
- Deacons called to do the secular business of the Church must be men filled with the Holy Ghost.
- That he was a good man, full of the Holy Ghost, was a greater recommendation of Barnabas than that he had parted with his lands.
- And even churches, like those in the highlands of Galatia, were no sooner brought into existence by the labors of the Apostle Paul than they were filled with the Holy Ghost.

In point of fact, the Christians of the first age were taught to expect this blessed filling. And the early Church was a collection of Holy-Ghost-filled people. Probably it was the exception, rather than the rule, not to be filled with the blessed presence of God and the Holy Ghost.

There is no formal conclusion to the Acts of the Apostles, because God meant the story to be prolonged through the ages, after the same manner.

Let us not think that God resembles some who put a portico of marble to a building which they finish with common brick. He did not give at Pentecost an experience which He either would not or could not maintain.

Pentecost was simply meant to be the specimen and type of all the days of all the years of the present age. And if our times seem to have fallen far below this blessed level, it is not because of any failure on God's part, but because the Church has neglected this holy doctrine.

Christians have seemed to suppose that the filling of the Holy Ghost was the prerogative of a few; the majority of them have never thought of it as within their reach; and the Church has been simply paralyzed for want of the only power that can avail her in her conflict against the world - a power which was distinctly pledged to her by her ascending Lord. We never can regain or hold our true position until all believers see that the filling of the Holy Ghost is equally for them as for the first Christians; and that the barriers are broken down which once limited it to a few.

We do not seek the sound of rushing wind, or the coronet of flame, or the special gifts which were conferred for a special purpose: these are the minor accessories of this filling, with which we can dispense. But what we cannot dispense with, and must not dream of missing, is, the distinct filling of the Holy Ghost.

No doubt He is in us if we are Christians; but we must never be content until He is in us in power - not a breath, but a mighty wind; not a rill, but a torrent; not an influence, but a mighty, energizing Person.

II. WE MUST COMPLY WITH CERTAIN CONDITIONS, IF WE WOULD BE FILLED

(1) *We must desire to be filled for the glory of God.*

A lady told me lately that she had long been seeking the power of the Spirit, but in vain. She could not understand the cause of her failure, till she came to see that she was seeking Him for the joy that He would bring, rather than for the glory that would accrue to God. Ah, we must seek for the Spirit's power, not for our happiness or comfort, nor yet for the good that we may be the better able to effect; but that "**Christ may be magnified in our bodies, whether by life or death.**"

(2) *We must bring cleansed vessels.*

God will not deposit His most precious gift in unclean receptacles. And we need cleansing in the precious Blood, ere we can presume to expect that God will give us what we seek. We cannot expect to be free from indwelling sin; but we may at least be washed in the Blood of Christ from all conscious filthiness and stain.

(3) *We must be prepared to let the Holy Spirit do as He will with and through us.*

There must be no reserve, no holding back, no contrariety of purpose. The whole nature must be unbarred, and every part yielded. There is a law in physics that forces work in the direction of least resistance. Let us present no resistance whatever to the working of the Holy Ghost. He who resists least will possess most. God gives the Holy Ghost to them that obey Him (Acts 5:32).

(4) *We must appropriate Him by birth.*

There is no need for us to wait ten days, because the Holy Spirit has been given to the church. This is included in the spiritual blessings with which our Father hath blessed us in Christ Jesus.

We need not struggle, and agonize, and convulse ourselves in the vehemence of entreaty; we have simply to take what God has allotted to us, and is waiting to impart. Open your mouth wide, and He will fill it. Dig the ditches, and though you can discern no evidences of the entering floods, they shall be filled.

Ask as a little child asks for its breakfast already on the table. So soon as you ask, you do receive, though you experience no rush of transcendent joy; go your way reckoning yourself filled, whether you feel so or not; and as the days go on, you will find that you have been filled, and are being filled, with new power, and joy, and wealth. You will not long be left to the reckoning of faith; for you will be made aware of a virtue going out from you, which shall heal and save.

III. TIME WOULD FAIL TO ENUMERATE ALL THE BLESSINGS THAT WILL ENSUE

The presence of the Holy Ghost in the heart, in all His glorious fullness, cannot be hid. It will surely betray itself, as the presence of the ever-burning fire in the hothouse is indicated by the luxuriance of flower and fruit within its tropical enclosure, whilst frost and snow reign in the world without.

There will be no effort, no striving after great effect, no ostentatious show. He distills as the dew upon the tender herb, and descends as the summer showers upon the mown grass.

This conception of His work is clearly taught by the word selected by the Apostle to describe the results of His indwelling. He speaks of them as the “**fruit of the Spirit,**” in contrast to the “**works of the flesh;**” and what deep suggestions of quiet growth, and exquisite beauty, and spontaneousness of life lie in that significant phrase!

In passing, we can do no more than enumerate some of the results of the indwelling of the Holy Ghost.

There is victory over sin.

The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus makes us free from the law of sin and death; just as the law of the elasticity of the air makes the bird free from the predominating power of the down-pull of gravitation.

There is the indwelling of the Lord Jesus. Christ dwells in the heart by the Holy Ghost; so that there are not two indwellings, but one.

And this not figurative or metaphorical, but a literal and glorious reality.

There is the quickening of the mortal body.

An expression which certainly points to the Resurrection; but which may mean some special strength and health imparted to our present mortal bodies - the tabernacles and temples of His indwelling.

There are all the graces of the Spirit, which come with linked hands; so that it is impossible to admit one of the golden sisterhood without her introducing all the radiant band.

Love brings joy; and joy peace; and peace long-suffering; and similarly through the whole series: so that the heart becomes at length tenanted, as was the grave of Christ, with angels.

There is also power for service.

No longer timid and frightened, the Apostles give their witness with great power. The Gospel comes in power and demonstration through consecrated lips and lives. The very devils are exorcised; and great crowds are brought to the feet of Christ.

This, and much more, is awaiting the moment in thy life, my reader, when thou shalt definitely avail thyself of thy privilege and become filled with the Holy Ghost. Then, as time rolls on, thou shalt work great deliverances among men, careless of praise or blame. Perhaps thou shalt know what it is to pass upward to meet Christ in the air. But certainly thou shalt stand beside Him in the regeneration when He shall appear in glory. And then in all the radiant throng there shall be naught to divert thy gaze from “**Jesus only**,” or thy thought from the decease (the exodus) which He accomplished at Jerusalem.

And amid the myriads of stars that shall shine forever in the firmament of Heaven, not one shall sparkle with more brilliant or more steady glory than Elijah; a man of like passions with ourselves, who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, out of weakness was made strong, waxed valiant in fight, swept to Heaven unhurt by death, and stood beside Christ on the Transfiguration Mount.

Prophet of Fire, till then, Farewell!

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