

THE HEAVENLY WIND

NO. 1356

A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“The wind blows where it listeth, and you hear the sound thereof,
but cannot tell whence it comes, and whither it goes:
so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”*

John 3:8.

THE Holy Spirit is to be admired, not only for the great truths which He teaches us in Holy Scripture, but also for the wonderful manner in which those truths are balanced. The Word of God never gives us too much of one thing or too little of another. It never carries a doctrine to an extreme, but tempers it with its corresponding doctrine. Truth seems to run at least in two parallel lines, if not in three, and when the Holy Spirit sets before us one line He wisely points out to us the other. The truth of divine sovereignty is qualified by human responsibility, and the teaching of abounding grace is seasoned by a remembrance of unflinching justice. Scripture gives us as it were the acid and the alkali—the rock and the oil which flows from it—the sword which cuts and the balm which heals.

As our Lord sent forth His evangelists two and two, so does He seem to send out His truths two and two, that each may help the other for the blessing of those who hear them. Now in this most notable third of John, you have two truths taught as plainly as if they were written with a sunbeam and taught side by side. The one is the necessity of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and the fact that whosoever believes in Him is not condemned. This is a vital doctrine, but there is a possibility of preaching it so baldly and so out of relation to the rest of God's Word that men may be led into serious error.

Justification by faith is a most precious truth, it is the very pith and heart of the Gospel, and yet you can dwell so exclusively upon it that you cause many to forget other important practical and experiential truths and so do them serious mischief. Salt is good, but it is not all that a man needs to live upon, and even if people are fed on the best of dry bread and nothing else they do not thrive. Every part of divine teaching is of practical value and must not be neglected.

Hence the Holy Spirit in this chapter lays equal stress upon the necessity of the new birth or the work of the Holy Spirit and He states it quite as plainly as the other grand truth. See how they blend, “You must be born again,” but, “whosoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.” “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God,” but, “he that believes on him is not condemned.” Two great truths are written in letters of light over the gate of heaven as the requisites of all who enter there—*Reconciliation by the blood of Jesus Christ* and *Regeneration by the work of the Holy Ghost*.

We must not put one of these truths before the other, nor allow one to obliterate or hide the other. They are of equal importance, for they are revealed by the same divine Spirit and are alike needful to eternal salvation. He who cares to preach either of these ought also diligently to teach the other, lest he be found guilty of violating that salutary precept, “What God has joined together let no man put asunder.” Avoid all neglect of faith and equally shun all undervaluing of the work of the Holy Ghost, so shall you find that narrow channel in which the way of truth does lie. You must rest in Christ that you may be accepted before God, but the work of the Holy Spirit within you is absolutely needful that you may be able to have communion with the pure and holy God. Faith gives us the rights of the children of

God, but the new birth must be experienced that we may have the nature of children. Of what use would rights be if we had not the capacity to exercise them?

Now, it is of the work of the Spirit of God, and of the man in whom the Spirit of God has worked, that I shall speak this morning, according to the tenor of the text. The text may be read two ways. First it may evidently refer *to the Holy Spirit Himself*. Do you not expect the text to run thus, “The wind blows where it listeth, and you hear the sound thereof, but cannot tell whence it comes, and whither it goes: so also is the Spirit of God”? Is not that the way in which you naturally expect the sentence to end? Yes, and I doubt not that such was really the Savior’s meaning, but frequently according to the New Testament idiom, the truth is not stated as our English modes of speech would lead us to expect.

For instance, “The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that sowed good seed in his ground.” Now the kingdom is not like the man, but like the whole transaction of the parable in which the man is the principal actor. “The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman seeking goodly pearls,” but the kingdom is not like the man, but the comparison runs into all that the man does. So here the Lord Jesus lays hold of one grand sphere of the Spirit’s operations and puts it down, intending, however, a wider sense.

There are certain readings of our text which would make this more clear if we could think them allowable, as for instance that which does not render the Greek word by “wind,” at all, but translates it “spirit” and makes it run, “The Spirit blows where He wishes, and you hear the sound thereof.” I do not adopt that reading, but there are several great authorities in its favor and this tends to show that our first head is correct.

When we have spoken upon that, we will take the language in its second sense, in reference *to the regenerate man*, and then we read, “The wind blows where it listeth, and you hear the sound thereof, but cannot tell whence it comes, and whither it goes: so is every man that is born of the Spirit.” He himself, like the Spirit of which he is born, is free and is mysterious in his ways, but discerned by the sound of his works and life.

I. Take the text in reference to THE HOLY SPIRIT HIMSELF.

The figure is the wind and as most of you know, the Hebrew word for “wind,” and for “spirit,” is the same. And it is interesting to note that the same is true with the Greek word, “*pneuma*,” which signifies both “breath” and “spirit,” so that the figure which the Savior used might very naturally grow out of the word which He employed. The wind is air in motion and is, of course, material, but air is apparently more spiritual than any of the other elements, except fire, since it is not to be grasped by the hand nor seen with the eye.

It is certain that wind really exists, for we hear the sound thereof and observe its various effects, but it is not to be touched, handled, or gazed upon. Men cannot traffic in it, or measure it in scales, or weigh it in balances. We may watch the clouds for hours as they hasten along like winged fowl, but the wind which drives them is out of our sight. We observe the waves roused to fury in the tempest, but the breath which so excites them we cannot see. Hence the word becomes all the more excellent a figure of that mighty power, the Holy Ghost, of whose existence no man ever doubts who has come under His influence, but who, nevertheless, is not to be tracked in His movements, nor to be seen as to His divine person, for He is mysterious, incomprehensible, and divine.

The metaphor of the wind cannot fully set forth the Holy Spirit, as you know, and consequently, many other natural figures are employed, such as fire, dew, water, light, oil, and so on, in order to exhibit all the phases of His influence. But still the wind is a most instructive metaphor as far as it goes, and as we cannot draw forth all its teaching in one sermon, let us be content to keep as closely as we can to the text.

First, the wind is a figure of the Holy Ghost *in its freeness*, “The wind blows where it listeth.” We speak of the wind as the very image of freedom. We say to those who would enthrall us, “go bind the winds,” as for ourselves, we claim to be “free as the winds which roam at their own will.” No one can fetter the wind. Xerxes threw chains into the Hellespont to bind the sea, but even he was not fool enough

to talk of forging fetters for the winds. The breezes are not to be dictated to. Caesar may decree what he pleases, but the wind will blow in his face if he looks that way. The Pope may command the gale to change its course, but it will blow around the Vatican neither less nor more for the holy father and the cardinals. A conference of plenipotentiaries from all the powers of Europe may sit for a week and resolve unanimously that the east wind shall not blow for the next six months, but it will take no heed of the arrangement and will cast dust into the counselors' eyes and whistle at their wisdom.

No proclamation nor purpose under heaven will be able to affect the wind by so much as half a point of the compass. It will blow according to its own sweet will, where it pleases, when it pleases, how it pleases, and as it pleases, for "the wind blows where it listeth." So is it, only in a far higher and more emphatic sense, with the Holy Spirit, for He is most free and absolute. You know that the wind is in the hand of God and that He ordains every zephyr and each tornado—winds arise and tempests blow by order from the throne supreme, but as for the Holy Spirit, He is God Himself and absolutely free, and works according to His own will and pleasure amongst the sons of men.

One nation has been visited by the Holy Spirit and not another—who shall tell me why? Why do the heathen lands lie in the dense darkness while on Britain the light of God is concentrated? Why has the Reformation taken root in England and among the northern nations of Europe, while in Spain and Italy it has left scarce a trace? Why blows the Holy Spirit here and not there? Is it not that He does as He wills? "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" is the declaration of the divine sovereignty and the Spirit of God in His movements confirms it.

Among the nations where the Spirit of God is at work, how is it that He blesses one man and not another? How is it that of two men hearing the same sermon and subject to the same influences at home, one is taken and the other left? Two children nursed at the same breast and trained by the same parents grow up to different ends. He who perishes in sin has no one to blame but himself, but he who is saved ascribes it all to grace—why came that grace to him? We never dare to lay the fault of man's not repenting and believing upon God—that rests with the evil will which refused to obey the Gospel—but we dare not ascribe the saving difference in the case of the one who believes to any natural goodness in himself, but we attribute it all to the grace of God and believe that the Holy Spirit works in such to will and to do according to His own good pleasure. But why works He in us? Why in any of the chosen? Ah, why? "The wind blows where it listeth."

So, too, is it with the blessing which rests upon ministries. One man wins souls to God and as a joyous reaper returns with full sheaves, but another who goes forth with strong desires, and seems at least to be as earnest as his fellow, comes home with a scanty handful of ears, which he has painfully gleaned. Why is one man's net full of fish and another's utterly empty? One servant of the Lord seems, whenever he stands up to preach the Gospel, to attract men to Jesus as though he had golden chains in his mouth which he did cast about men's hearts to draw them in joyful captivity to his Lord, while another cries in bitterness of soul, "Who has believed our report?" Truly, "the wind blows where it listeth."

Ay, and these changes happen to each man differently. One day the preacher shall be all alive, his spirit shall be stirred within him and he shall speak evidently with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, and tomorrow he shall find himself dull and heavy, even to his own consciousness and even more so to his people's experience, for the power rests not upon him. One day he speaks like the voice of God and another day he is but as a reed shaken of the wind. His fat kine of years gone by are devoured by the lean cattle of the present. He has his famine as well as his plenty. You shall see him come forth today with the unction of the Lord upon him and his face shining with the glory of fellowship with the Most High, and tomorrow he shall say, "Look not upon me, for I am black," for the glory shall have departed.

We know what it is to come forth like Samson when his locks were shorn and to shake ourselves as at other times and discover that the Lord is not with us. Why all this? Is it not because "the wind blows

where it listeth"? The Holy Spirit, for His own wise reasons, puts not forth an equal power upon any man at all times. We cannot control nor command the Spirit of the living God. He is in the highest sense a free agent. "Thy free Spirit" is a name which David gave Him and a most appropriate name it is.

Yet, beloved, do not fall into a misapprehension. The Holy Ghost is absolutely free in His operations, but He is not arbitrary. He does as He wills, but His will is infallible wisdom. The wind, though we have no control over it, has a law of its own, and the Holy Ghost is a law unto Himself. He does as He wills, but He wills to do evermore that which is for the best.

Moreover, we know with regard to the wind that there are certain places where you will almost always find a breeze—not here, in the teeming city, nor down in the valley shut in by the mountains, nor on yonder steaming marsh. But lift up your eyes to the hills and mark how the breeze courses along the downs, and sweeps the summits of the mountain ranges. In the morning and the evening, when the inland air is hot as an oven, gentle winds come to and from the sea and fan the fisher's cheek. You may find places where the air seems always stagnant and men's hearts grow heavy amid the feverish calm, but there are elevated hillsides where life is easy, for the air exhilarates by its perpetual freshness. Brethren among lively saints, in the use of the means of grace, in private prayer, in communion with the Lord, you will find the wind that blows where it listeth always in motion.

The wind too has at least in some lands its times and seasons. We know that at certain times of the year we may expect winds and if they come not to a day or two, yet as a rule, the month is stormy, and there are also trade winds, monsoons which blow with remarkable regularity and are counted upon by mariners. And so with the Spirit of God. We know that at certain times He visits the churches and under certain conditions puts forth His power. If, for instance, there is mighty prayer, you may be sure the Spirit of God is at work. If the people of God meet together and besiege the throne of grace with cries and tears, the spiritual barometer indicates that the blessed wind is rising.

Besides, the Holy Spirit has graciously connected Himself with two things, truth and prayer. Preach the truth, publish the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and it is the habit of the Holy Spirit to make the Word quick and powerful to the hearts of men. If we falsify His Word, if we keep back part of the truth, if we become unfaithful, we cannot expect the Holy Spirit to bless us. But if our teaching be Christ crucified, lovingly set forth, and if the grace of God in its fullness is really declared, the Holy Spirit will attend the truth and make it the great power of God. I will not say that it is always and without exception so, but I think exceptions must be rare.

Almost invariably the Spirit bears witness with the truth in the conversion of men. So too with prayer, the Holy Spirit is pleased to connect Himself with that also, if it be believing prayer. Here the connection is exceedingly intimate, because it is the Spirit of God who Himself gives the believing prayer, and it is not only true that the Spirit will be given in answer to prayer, but the Spirit is already given or the believing prayer would never have been offered. The spirit of prayerfulness, the spirit of anxiety for the conversion of men, is one of the surest indications that the Holy Spirit is already at work in the minds of His people.

Coming back, however, to the great fact that we cannot command the Holy Spirit, what influence ought that truth to have upon us? Should it not be just this? It should lead us to be very tender and jealous in our conduct towards the Holy Ghost so that we do not grieve Him and cause Him to depart from us. Vex not the Spirit. When you enjoy His gracious operations, be devoutly grateful and walk humbly before God that you may retain them, and when He is at work, let not negligence on your part cause you to receive the grace of God in vain.

The wind blew, but the sailor was asleep. It was a favorable breeze, but he had cast anchor and his boat moved not. If he had but known it, all through the night he would have spread his sail and have made good headway towards his port. But he slumbered and the blessed wind whistled through the cordage and the ship lay idle at its moorings. Let it not be so with us. Never suffer the Spirit of God to be with us and find us regardless of His presence.

In the olden times, when country people depended more than they do now on the use of windmills to grind their corn, some parishes would be half-starved when, week after week there had been no wind. The miller would look up anxiously and everybody in the parish would become a watchman for his sails, hoping that they would soon be set in motion. If the breeze stirred at the dead of night and the miller was sound asleep, somebody or other would run and wake him up. "The wind is blowing, the wind is blowing, grind our corn."

So it ought to be whenever the Spirit of God is vigorously working in His church, we should eagerly avail ourselves of His power. We should be so anxious for His divine operations that all should be on the watch, so that if some did not discover it, others would, and observant ones would cry, "The Holy Ghost is working with us. Let us arise and labor more abundantly." Hoist sail when the wind favors. You cannot command it, therefore carefully value it.

But we must pass on. The Holy Spirit is described as being like the wind as to *His manifestations*. "You hear," says Jesus, "the sound thereof." It has been suggested, and some have enlarged upon it, that there are many other manifestations of the presence of wind. You can feel it, you can see its results upon the trees and the waves, and sometimes you can be sure that the wind has been at work by the devastation which it has caused. But in this place our Savior was not so much alluding to a great wind as to the gentler breezes.

The Greek word, "pneuma," is translated, "breath," and can hardly be made to mean a tempest. It was a gentle wind like a zephyr of which the Lord was here speaking. The great winds, as I have already said, can be somewhat calculated upon, but if you sit in the garden in the cool of the evening it is utterly impossible for you to tell from where the zephyrs come and where they go. They are so volatile in their movements and untrackable in their course. Here, there, everywhere the soft breezes of evening steal among the flowers. Our Lord tells us that such gentle zephyrs are heard. Nicodemus, in the stillness of the night, could hear them. "You hear the sound thereof." The leaves rustle and that is all. You hear a gentle movement of branch and stem and as it were the tinkling of flower-bells, and so you discover that the wind is flitting among the beds and borders.

Now, beloved, this shows us that the hearing ear is intended by God to be the discerner of the Spirit to men—to the most of men the only discerner that they have. "You hear the sound thereof." What a wonderful dignity the Lord has been pleased to put upon this little organ, the ear. The Romish church gives the preference always to the eye. Her priests are always for astonishing men into grace with their wonderful performances, but God's way is, "Faith comes by hearing," and the first detector of the Holy Ghost is the ear.

To some men this is the only revealer of His mysterious presence, as I have already said—they hear the sound thereof, that is to say, they hear the Gospel preached—they hear the Word of God read. Truth, when it is couched in words, is the rustling of the holy wind, it is the footstep of the Eternal Spirit as mysteriously He passes along a congregation. Oh, what grief it is that some never get any further than this, but abide where Nicodemus was at the first—they hear the sound thereof and nothing more.

Some of you are now daily hearing the truth which has saved thousands, but it does not save you. You are hearing the very truth which peoples heaven, but yet it leaves you without a hope of eternal life. Yet be you sure of this, the kingdom of God has come nigh unto you. "You hear the sound thereof," and that wind whose whispers you hear is not far off your own cheek. When you hear the rustling among the boughs of the trees, the breezes are not far to seek, nor is the Spirit of God far away when His sound is heard.

Some hearers, however, go further, for they hear the sound of the Spirit in their consciences and it disturbs them. They would sleep as do others, but as the wind sometimes comes whistling through the keyhole or howls down the chimney and wakes the sluggard, or if the man is lying in a garden asleep, the breezes play around his ears and face and startle him, so it is with many unconverted people. They cannot be quiet, for they hear the sound of the Holy Spirit in their consciences, and are troubled and perplexed. There is a revival and they are not saved, but they are startled and alarmed by it. Their sister

is converted, they are not, but still it comes very near them and they feel as if an arrow had gone whizzing by their own ear.

It is hard living in a careless state in the midst of revival. "You hear the sound thereof." But some of you in your conscience are hearing the sound now in your family circle, from the fact that one after another of your relatives have been brought to know the Lord. You cannot avoid feeling that there is something powerful abroad, though it has not yet exerted its regenerating power upon you.

As for the man who is saved, he hears the Holy Spirit in the most emphatic sense and with what variety that sound comes to him. At first he heard it as a threatening wind, which bowed him in sadness and seemed to sweep all his hopes to the ground, as the withered leaves of the forest are carried in the autumn's wind. When the Spirit's voice sounded in my ears at the first it was as a wail of woe, as a wind among the tombs, as a sigh among faded lilies. It seemed as if all my hopes were puffed away like smoke or as the night mists in the morning breeze. Nothing was left for me but to mourn my nothingness.

Then I heard a sound as of the hot sirocco of the East, as if it issued from a burning oven. You know the text, "The grass withers and the flower thereof fades away, because the Spirit of the Lord blows upon it: surely the people is grass." In my soul there had bloomed a fair meadow of golden kingcups and fair flowers of many dainty colors, but the Spirit of God blew thereon and withered it all, and left it as a dry, brown, rusty plain, whereon was neither life nor comeliness. So far the sacred wind destroys that which is evil, but it ends not there, for we thank God we have heard the sound of the Spirit as a quickening wind. The prophet cried, "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain that they may live." The wind came and the dead arose an exceeding great army.

The like miracle has been wrought on us. The withered bones of our own death have crept together, bone unto his bone, and flesh has come upon them, and now because of the divine breath we have begun to live. Now also when the Holy Spirit visits us, He renews our life and energy, and we have life more abundantly. The Holy Spirit has since then been to us full often a melting wind, "He causes his wind to blow and the waters flow." Locked up in the chains of ice all through the winter, the waters are still as a stone, but the spring winds come, the brooks find liberty and leap away to the rivers, and the rivers flow in all their free force to add their volume to the sea.

So has the Spirit of God oftentimes broken up our frost and given our spirits joyous liberty. He melts the rocky heart and dissolves the iron spirit—at the sound of His goings men are moved to feeling. We know the sound of this wind also as a diffusive breath, drawing forth and diffusing our slumbering graces. "Awake, O north wind; and come, you south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out."

Oh, what a sweet unloosing of holy gratitude and love and hope and joy has there been in our heart when the Spirit of God has visited us. As sweet essences lie hidden in the flowers and come not forth until the loving wind does entice them to fly abroad, so do sweet graces lie within renewed spirits until the Holy Spirit comes and speaks to them, and they know His voice and come forth to meet Him and sweet fragrances are shed abroad.

Yes, my brethren, all this we know, and we have heard the sound of the Holy Spirit in another sense, namely, as going forth with us to the battle of the Lord. We have heard that sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees which David heard and we have bestirred ourselves and victory has been ours. If we have not heard that rushing mighty wind which came at Pentecost, yet have we felt its divine effect, which ceases not, but still brings life, power, energy, and all that is wanted for the conversion of the sons of men to us who are bidden to go forth and preach the Gospel amongst the nations. In all these respects the Holy Ghost has manifested Himself, as wind does, by His sound. "You hear the sound thereof." "Their sound went into all the earth and their words unto the ends of the world."

A third likeness of the Spirit to the wind is set before us in the point of *mystery*. "You cannot tell whence it comes nor whither it goes." Of the wind we may tell that it comes from such-and-such a quarter or point, but you cannot put your finger on the map and say, "The north wind began in this

region,” or “Here the west wind was born.” Indeed, we know very little about the winds—their origin or their laws. One of the best and most accurate observers of the wind during thirty years, recorded every wind in his region, until at the end of the term he abandoned the few rules which he had laid down during the first two or three years, for he found that no rule held good.

No man can say whence the wind leaps forth. The heathen dreamed of a certain cave where the winds were enclosed as in a prison and suffered to go abroad one by one—it was but a fable. We know not where the winds first spread their wings or where they sleep when all is still. So is it with the Holy Spirit in the mind of man, His first movements are hidden in mystery. You know that you are converted, my dear friend, and you know somewhere about the time, and probably you remember somewhat as to the means which the Lord used for your salvation. Those outward circumstances you do know, but how the Holy Spirit operated upon you, you do not and cannot tell how swells the life within the seed until it springs up and becomes the full corn in the ear, or how the sap in the trees first descends in the winter and afterwards climbs again in the spring.

There are secrets which nature does not reveal and the work of the Spirit is even more a secret, and assuredly no man can explain it to his fellow or to himself. Why is it, my friend, that you obtained a blessing under one sermon but not under another, and yet when you spoke to your sister, she had been more blessed under the second than the first? The power does not come from the preacher, then, it is clear and “you cannot tell whence it comes.”

There are times in which you feel not only that you can pray, but that you must pray—how come you to be in that state? I know what it is to feel a very ecstasy of delight in the Lord, for which I can scarcely account, for at another time, when I have been engaged in the same work and I think with the same earnestness, I have not been conscious of any such exceeding delight in God. At one time the heart will be full of penitence as if it would break because of sin and at another season it will overflow with such delight in Christ that the sin seems almost forgotten in the pardoning sacrifice. Why these diverse operations?

We know what it is at times to feel such a sense of death upon us as to be earnestly preparing for our last hours and at another time we seem to be altogether forgetful of death and to be living, as it were, the immortal life already, raised up together and made to sit together with Christ. But how these various modes and forms and workings of the Spirit come, who among us shall tell? Go trace the dewdrops, if you can, to the womb of the morning, and discover which way went the lightning’s flash or how the thunder rolled along the mountain tops, but you cannot tell nor can you guess whence comes the Spirit of God into your souls.

Nor can we tell whither it goes. Here, again, is another mystery. Oh, it charms me to think that when we let loose the truth in the power of the Spirit we never know where it will fly. A child takes a seed, one of those little downy seeds which has its own parachute to bear it through the air. The little one blows it into the air, but who knows where that downy seed shall settle and in whose garden it shall grow?

Such is truth, even from the mouths of babes and sucklings. Whole continents have been covered with strange flowers simply by the wind blowing foreign seeds thither, and mariners have discovered sunny islets out there in the Southern Sea, where foot of man has never trodden, covered with abundance of vegetation which the wind has by degrees wafted thither. Scatter the truth on all sides, for you cannot tell where the Spirit will carry it. Fling it to the winds and you shall find it after many days. Scatter the living seed with both hands—send it north, south, east, and west, and God will give it wings.

*“Waft, waft ye winds the story,
And you, ye waters roll,
Till like a sea of glory
It spreads from pole to pole.”*

I had a letter but the other day when I was sore sick. It was written by a sister in Christ in the very heart of the empire of Brazil. She said that she had met with a copy of my, “Morning Readings,” and had found thereby the way of peace and therefore she wrote me such a loving, touching letter that, as I read it, it brought tears to my eyes. There was something more affecting yet, for at the end was written in another hand, some words to the effect that his dear wife who had written the above letter had died soon after finishing it, and with a bleeding heart the lone husband sent it on to me, rejoicing that the Word of God came to his wife’s soul in the far-off land.

Brethren, you do not know where the Word will go and the Spirit with it. In Bohemia, the papists thought they had stamped out the Gospel and with cruel edicts they kept down all thought of Protestantism, but just lately, since the toleration, the Gospel has been preached in that country, and to the surprise of everybody there have come forward men and women from lone cottages in the woods and from different corners of the great cities of Bohemia, bringing with them ancient copies of the Word of God, themselves being eager to know the precious truth for which they remember that their fathers died. A truth of God will go down the centuries—like the river, it sings—

*“Men may come and men may go,
But I go on forever.”*

“You cannot tell whither it goes,” it will travel on till the millennium. Send that saying abroad that the truth cannot die. The persecutor cannot kill it, it is immortal like the God who sent it forth. The persecutor cannot even stay its course, it is divine. Popery will always be in danger so long as there is one leaf of the Bible upon earth or one man living who knows the Savior. Antichrist cannot triumph. The Holy Spirit wars against it with the sword of the Word of God and you cannot tell how far into the heart of error any truth may be driven. To the overthrow of falsehood and the death of sin, the Spirit speeds on, but you know not how.

“You cannot tell whither it goes,” either in any one heart. If you have received the Holy Spirit into your heart, you cannot tell where He will carry you. I am sure that William Carey, when he gave his young heart to Christ, never thought the Spirit of God would carry him to Serampore to preach the Gospel to the Hindus. And when George Whitefield first drank of the life-giving Spirit, it never occurred to him that the tavern keeper at the Bell Inn at Gloucester would thunder the Gospel over two continents and turn thousands to Christ. No! You know not to what blessed end this wind will waft you.

Commit yourselves to it—be not disobedient to the heavenly vision. Be ready to be borne along as the Spirit of God shall help you, even as the dust in the summer’s breeze. And O child of God, you do not know to what heights of holiness and degrees of knowledge and ecstasies of enjoyment the Spirit of God will bear you. “Eye has not seen nor ear heard the things which God has prepared for them that love him,” and though He has revealed them by His Spirit (for the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God), yet even to the best taught child of God it is not yet known, to the full whither the Spirit of God goes. “Trust you in the Lord forever, for in the Lord Jehovah there is everlasting strength,” and He will bear you onward and upward, even to perfection itself, and you shall be with Jesus, where He is, and behold His glory.

II. I have but a few minutes left for my second head, but I do not need many, since I do not wish to say much upon it. The text relates TO THOSE WHO ARE BORN OF THE SPIRIT.

“The wind blows where it listeth, and you hear the sound thereof, but cannot tell whence it comes, and whither it goes: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.” The birth partakes of the nature of the parent. That which is born of the Spirit is like unto the Spirit of which it is born, even as that which is born of the flesh is flesh and is similar to the flesh by which it is begotten. The twice-born man is like the Holy Ghost who produced him and he is like Him in each of the points which we have already dwelt upon.

As to freedom, you may say of him, “He blows where he listeth.” The Spirit of God makes the believer a free man, bestows on him the freedom of his will, which he never had before, and gives him a delightful consciousness of liberty. “If the Son make you free, you shall be free indeed.” I do not affirm that every spiritual man does as he wishes, because, alas, I see another law in our members warring against the law of our mind and bringing us into captivity to the law of sin and death, but still, “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”

Now you can pray, which you could not do before. Now you can praise, though you could not extract a note of praise from your ungrateful heart before. Now you can cry, “Abba, Father.” Now you can draw near to God. You are no longer under man’s control, you blow where you list. You are not now ruled by priestcraft, nor domineered over by the opinion of your fellow man. The Lord has set you free and you wish to go where God’s Word bids you go, and you find the utmost liberty in going that way.

Oh, brethren, I cannot tell you the change which is felt by a regenerate man in the matter of spiritual liberty. When you were under the bondage of the law of custom and of sin, and of fear of death and dread of hell, you were like a man shut up in one of those cells in Venice which lie below the level of the water mark, where the air is foul and the poor prisoner can only stir half-a-dozen feet and then walk back again in the darkness. But when the Spirit of God comes, He brings the soul from darkness into light, from clammy damp into the open air. He sets before you an open door, He helps you to run in the ways of God’s commands, and as if that were not enough, He even lends you wings and bids you mount as the eagle, for He has set you free.

Again, the man who is born of the Spirit is somewhat *manifested* and is known by his sound. “You hear the sound thereof.” The most ungodly man, if he lives near a Christian, will hear the sound of him. The secret life within will speak, words there will be, for Christians are not dumb, but actions will speak more loudly still. And even apart from actions, the very spirit and tone of the man who is really regenerated will speak and the ungodly man will be compelled to hear it. “You hear the sound thereof.”

And now notice *the mystery* there is about a Christian. You know nothing, if you are unregenerate, about the life the believer leads, for he is dead and his life is hid with Christ in God. You know not whence he comes forth in the morning—those beds of spices which have made his garments fragrant, you have not seen. That weeping in prayer or that rejoicing in fellowship with which he opened the morning you know nothing of, and you cannot know until you are yourself born of the Spirit.

Neither can you tell where the spiritual man goes. In the midst of his trouble, you see him calm. Do you know where he went to win that rare quietude? In the hour of death, you see him triumphant. Do you know where he has been to learn to die so joyously? No, the unregenerate man knows not whither the believer goes. There is a secret place of the Most High and they shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty who have once learned to enter there, but carnal men come not into this secret chamber.

The Christian life is a mystery all through, from its beginning to its end. To the worldling all a mystery and to the Christian himself a puzzle. He cannot read his own riddle, nor understand himself. This one thing he knows, “Whereas I was once blind, now I see.” This also he knows, “O Lord, I am Your servant. I am Your servant and the son of Your handmaid: You have loosed my bonds.” This also he knows that when his Lord shall be revealed, then will he also shine forth as the sun.

The life within him in its coming and going is all a mystery to him, but he blesses God that he has fellowship therein. He goes on his way feeling that though men know not whence he is, nor whither he is going, yet the Lord knows him and he himself is sure that he is going to his Father and his God. O that every one of you had so delightful a hope. The Lord grant it to you, for Jesus’ sake.

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—JOHN 2:23-25, 3:1-23
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—166, 445, 448.**

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.