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The Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Anointing

by T. Austin-Sparks

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Jan-Feb 1967, Vol. 45-1.

"And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and he entered, as his custom was, into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Isaiah. And he opened the book, and found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor" (Luke 4:16-18).

"Jesus of Nazareth, how that God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil, for God was with him" (Acts 10:38).

"And ye have an anointing from the Holy One.... And as for you, the anointing which ye received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any one teach you, but as his anointing teacheth you concerning all things, and is true, and is no lie, and even as it taught you, ye abide in him" (1 John 2:20,27).

Matthew 13:1-13.

One of the great needs of our time is to recover the meaning of things with which we are familiar. We, as Christians, know many things, but we have lost much of the meaning of those things. We are going to think a little about the meaning of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of anointing.

You will notice that that word 'anointing' occurs in three of the passages which we read. The Lord Jesus said that His Father had anointed Him to preach. Then Luke, in the book of the Acts, said: 'Jesus of Nazareth, whom God anointed with the Holy Spirit', the result of which was that He 'went about doing good', and registering the impact of His anointing upon the devil. Then John, in his Letter, says: 'Ye have an anointing from the Holy One.'

Now in this very big matter we just want to put our finger upon this one thing: what it means to have the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of anointing. And may I say here, at once, that every Christian is supposed to have received the Holy Spirit. The Word of God says, most emphatically, that if we have not received the Holy Spirit we do not belong to Christ. That Scripture says: "If any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Romans 8:9). Well, I suppose everyone reading this would claim to belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. Would you say: 'I belong to Jesus Christ'? Do you know what that means? Do you know that the very name 'Christ' means 'Anointed'? So to belong to the Lord Jesus Christ means to be joined to the Anointed, and that just means that we are joined to His anointing.

That is very simple, and I expect old Christians think I am being too elementary. Well, wait a minute - I have not finished yet!

Would you say that what the anointing meant in the case of Jesus Christ it should also mean in our case? Is it possible to be joined to the One who is anointed and not take the anointing from Him? If you are a married woman, when you married you took the name of your husband. His name came down on your head, and you bear his name as long as you both live. Now the New Testament says that we Christians are married to the Lord Jesus. Do you know what happened when people came to the Lord Jesus in New Testament times? They were brought in front of the assembly of the Lord's people, and the apostles or elders of that assembly put their hands on the heads of these believers and called on them the name of the Lord Jesus. They declared that His name now rested upon them, and from that day they were called 'Christians'. They had the name of Christ upon them. Christ always meant to them 'the Anointed', and so they called the anointing upon these believers. That is meant to be true right from the beginning of our Christian life, but there is a difference between having the Holy Spirit and knowing what it means. My business is to tell you what it means and, as I have said, we are just going to put our finger upon one thing that it means.

There was nothing neutral about the Lord Jesus Christ. There was something positive about Him right from His birth. When the old man Simeon took the baby Jesus in his arms, he said: "This child is set for the falling and rising up of many in Israel" (Luke 2:34), and that meant that human destiny was bound up with that little life. That little life was going to decide the rising or falling, life or death, for many in Israel, so that right from His birth there was something very positive about Him. Why was that? Because He was born of the Holy Spirit. The angel said to Mary: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee" (Luke 1:35). Jesus was born of the Holy Spirit, therefore there was nothing neutral about Him. Things about Him were very positive because of the Holy Spirit.

Now naturally you may be twenty, thirty, forty, fifty or sixty years old, but spiritually you may be only a day old. Naturally you may be six feet tall, but spiritually you may be just a little baby. But if you have been born of the Holy Spirit human destiny is bound up with your life, even as an infant. There ought to be something very positive about you, even as a spiritual babe.

Or you may have grown up to be twelve years old spiritually. When Jesus was twelve years old everyone knew that there was something very positive about Him. He was taken up to Jerusalem, to the great temple where were all the very wise men, with their grey hair and beards, and this little boy of twelve years of age began to ask them some questions. These old men scratched their grey hairs and said: 'What are we to say to that? Where did this boy get all this? This is no ordinary boy! There is something different about him from other boys.' Then the old men thought they would have a turn, and they asked Jesus some of their very wise questions. He just answered them without any difficulty, and they looked at one another and said: 'What sort of a boy is this? He seems to know all the answers.' There was something quite positive about Him, and all the people knew it: 'He has a knowledge that we do not have.' Why was that? Because He was born of the Holy Spirit.

Then in manhood He "went about doing good... for God was with him". In every realm of life He registered something positive. Was it in the realm of the empty religious world? How His presence made all their religion seem so empty! In the simple realm of human life, day by day, people felt something when Jesus was there. In the official realm it was just the same. Men like Herod and Pilate did not know what to make of this man! There was something about Him that they could not understand and with which they could not cope. Then in the spiritual realm of the devil and his kingdom; Jesus did not have to say anything when He came where demons were in possession - the demons cried out. His presence disturbed them. Whether it was individuals, or whether it was groups of people, or whether it was the multitude, the presence of Jesus was positive in its effect, and that was because He was anointed of the Holy Spirit.

Do you see what I am saying? Do you see what is the meaning of having the anointing? If it is true that you and I have been anointed of the Holy Spirit, as we ought to be, our presence in this world ought to register something positive for God. It ought to be impossible for us to come into this world, and go out of it, without having registered something upon it. People in this world ought to feel something when we are near them. The devil himself ought to take notice that, because we are here under the Holy Spirit, Jesus is here. It is impossible for Jesus to be anywhere without something happening, and now Jesus is here by the Holy Spirit in believers. Therefore there ought to be nothing neutral about any Christian.

Now I expect you are wondering why we read that parable of the Sower. I will tell you why: for this very reason of which we are speaking.

"The sower went forth to sow..." Jesus said later that the sower is the Son of man, and the seed is the Word of God (Luke 8:11). I have often heard it said about this parable that three parts of the sowing resulted in nothing - the seed which fell by the wayside, the seed which fell on the rocky ground and the seed which fell amongst thorns all came to nothing. Are you sure that is right? The Bible says, from God: "My word... shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish..." (Isaiah 55:11). Here is the Son of God giving the Word of God. Will you say that three parts of the sowing of the Word of God by Jesus Christ is for nothing? We have to think again.

Here you have four classes of people, and they are brought right out into the full light and for all time (two thousand years at least). You see what kind of people they are. The truth about them is made manifest for all history to see. Is that negative? I think that is very positive!

"Some seeds fell by the wayside, and the birds came and devoured them." Is that all there is to say about it? No, there is a kind of person described there, the person who is careless and indifferent about Divine things. The things of God brought by the Word of God don't matter at all to him, and so he writes them off and says: 'Well, they don't matter.' So far as he is concerned, Jesus Christ has worked in vain. But stop! Listen to Jesus: "The word that I spake, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). These people will stand before the great judgment bar of God without any excuse. They will never be able to say: 'I never knew... I never heard.' Oh no, there is nothing neutral about Jesus! If His word comes our way, we may be careless and indifferent, and not interested, but that word is coming back in eternity. "This child is set for the falling and rising up of many" ... "My word... shall not return unto me void."

Some seeds "fell upon the rocky places, where they had not much earth". Here is another class of people lifted up for history to see. These are those shallow people who have no sense of the value of the things of God. These people, when there is something being spoken from God, say: 'Oh well, I don't think I am going to the meeting today. I am going for a walk' - or, 'I am going to have a drive

out in the car', or, 'I am going to do this... that... or something else.' They have no sense of the infinite value of Divine things which would make them say: 'I will not miss that. There may be something that will make all the difference to my life if I am there.' Do you know those people? Jesus has lifted them up for all history to see: people whose eternal destiny is bound up with their attitude toward Divine things.

"And others fell upon the thorns; and the thorns grew up, and choked them." Is that all? Does the story end there? No; here Jesus has again shown us another category of people. In explaining this parable He says: 'The thorns are the cares of this world' ... 'Success in my profession becomes the most important thing. The prosperity of my business comes first.' These are the people with whom the things of this life take pre-eminence, the people for whom the world (whatever that means) means more than the things of God. These are the people who mean business for anything except the things of God, and they do not mean business for God so much that they put Him first.

These are all very distinct types of people, but it does not matter to which class they belong, they are all responsible when once they have heard the Word of God.

I could go on to speak about the seed that fell on good ground - and even there there are differences in the people and in the result. Jesus said that some brought forth a hundredfold. These are the people who are utter for the Lord, one hundred percent for the things of God, and are going all the way with Him, no matter what it costs. There are some people like that. Some brought forth sixtyfold. These are the people who go on with the Lord, but they just stop short somewhere. They do not go on in fullness. And some brought forth thirtyfold. Yes, they love the Lord, but they have some reservations. 'Don't let us be fanatical. Let us be quite balanced.' You know these people! 'Yes, we are the Lord's, but let us be careful!' They bring forth just thirtyfold.

Now why have we said all this? Just to show that, in one way or another, anything that comes from Jesus is positive. The Holy Spirit is positive, and not negative, and if the Holy Spirit is really Lord in our lives, our lives will count for something. There will be an influence from our lives which will be eternal. Thank God for the Holy Spirit! Let us be sure to ask the Lord that the anointing shall have a free way in our lives. The effect of the Holy Spirit may be to condemn some people, and it may be to redeem others, but He cannot be neutral, and if the anointing is upon you and upon me, the devil will take account of it. May the Lord help us to see that that may not be a bad thing! Do you want the devil to say: 'Oh, that man, that woman, does not matter. You need not bother about him, or her!' I had a friend once who, whenever we were parting and going our different ways, took hold of my hand and said: 'Goodbye, old man. The Lord make you a nuisance to the devil!' Well, that is how it will be if the Holy Spirit is really upon us, for that is how it was with the Lord Jesus.

Do you see the meaning of the anointing of the Holy Spirit? May the Lord make this very real to us!