

The Holy Spirit 2017 Part 4 Symbols

Oil and Water

We continue our summer series on the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Last Sunday we talked about two symbols used in the Scripture to help us understand something of the nature and the work of the Spirit. Specifically, we talked about fire and wind or breath. This morning I want to look at the symbols of oil and water. Let's talk first about water.

The Holy Spirit is symbolized by water. Turn with me to John 7 and look at an interesting story involving Jesus. **“On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, ‘If a man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.’ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.” John 7:37-39.**

The feast to which John is referring is the Feast of Tabernacles. It was also called the Feast of Booths because the Jewish people were instructed to build tabernacles or booths in which to live during the week of the feast. It was to remind them of the 40 years they spent in the wilderness and that God had brought them out and into the promised land. It was a week-long festival or feast, one of the three in which the faithful were supposed to go up to Jerusalem. Part of the ritual of the feast included a water ceremony. Each day a procession of priests descended from the temple mount, down the royal stairway to the Pool of Siloam where they filled a golden pitcher with water. As a choir sang the words of Isaiah, “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation” Isaiah 12:3, the water was carried back up the hill to the temple where the priest would pour the water onto the altar as a libation, an offering to the Lord. The crowds would rejoice, singing Psalms and carrying tree branches reminiscent of the booths they built in the wilderness and citrus branches reminiscent of the harvest.

This was seen as an offering of thanksgiving for God's provision. It was also a prayer of supplication for the Lord to bless their crops by sending the autumn rain. But there was other symbolism in all of this. The prophet Zechariah spoke of the day of the Lord when the Messiah would come and his rule would be established. He spoke of the nations coming to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. In that day, the day of the Messiah's ultimate rule, the prophet pictured living water flowing from the temple mount and blessing the whole earth. He said **“On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea and half**

to the western sea, in summer and in winter. The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name.” Zechariah 14:8-9.

The prophet was declaring that in the day of the Lord there would be no more seasons of drought, but life-giving water flowing in both summer and winter. The living water, implying the very life and presence of God, would flow from the temple of the Lord in unceasing abundance. It was an amazing vision of living water flowing from God’s temple, from the place of his presence, the place of his mercy.

That’s part of what they were thinking and hoping for as the priests poured water upon the altar. They did this ceremony seven times on the last day of the feast. It’s as they are doing this that Jesus stood and cried out in a loud voice, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.” It was as though he was saying, “The priests are pouring out water that reminds us of God’s promised blessing, of living water. But the priesthood now is corrupt and unholy. This is only ritual, but if you are really thirsty...if you really want life, if you want living water, come to me and drink!” Jesus wasn’t offering a ritual, he was offering a relationship. “Come to me and drink.” Jesus is offering us life and that life giving water, that life giving relationship comes by His Holy Spirit at work in us.

Remember to the Samaritan woman at the well Jesus said, **“Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” John 4:13-14.** This is living water Jesus is offering. This is life itself that comes from believing upon Him. What a bold proclamation. It would be arrogant if he wasn’t the true Son of God and the Savior of the world. It would be foolish unless he was truly the source of that life-giving, living water. “Come to me if you are thirsty. Let whoever believes in me drink. As the Scripture says, streams of living water will flow from within him.”

It’s a bold and amazing invitation. John then explains in his gospel, **“By this he meant the Holy Spirit.” John 7:39** Jesus’ invitation is to come to him, thirsty and desperate, searching for answers and for something that satisfies. Come to him and believing, drink. Drink and be changed and then experience the unceasing flow of that living water in your life. Experience the life giving presence of the Holy Spirit first hand.

While the passage in Zechariah is telling of a future day when Jesus is ruling in a Messianic kingdom, the Holy Spirit dwelling within us that Jesus and John are talking about is

for right now! Think of His presence at work in us now as a small tributary of an eternal river of living water that flows unceasingly, forever. Think of the Spirit like a down-payment of what is to come. His presence at work in us now is just a taste of what eternal life is and will be.

Thirsty? The invitation is to “anyone.” That’s pretty inclusive. Everyone may come to him and believe and drink and receive this life giving, living water. Consider for a minute the importance and significance of water and of the Holy Spirit.

Water, like breath, is necessary to sustain life. The Old Testament gives us a picture of the Holy Spirit like water poured on dry ground. **“For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring and my blessing on your descendants.” Isaiah 44:3.** Water is life in the Middle East. It’s all about access to water. Without it, you die. It is the same for us in a spiritual sense. For us, the Holy Spirit is life. That living water flows, not from a temple mount in Jerusalem, but from the very throne of God. He desires to pour his Spirit on the dry and thirsty ground of our hearts and lives. He desires to give us living water so we can truly live. May our prayer be, “Holy Spirit, rain down upon us, well up within us, revive us and give us life.”

Water cleanses and refreshes. As water refreshes and cleans our physical body, the Holy Spirit wants to wash and cleanse our soul and spirit from the deadness and filth of the world that tries to infiltrate our soul. It is part of the cleansing, sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. The bible says, **“He saved us through the washing of rebirth and the renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior.” Titus 3:5** He washes and renews us, giving us new life, new hope, making us new creations in Christ.

The Holy Spirit as living water both welling up within us and being poured over us, is rejuvenating. You know that feeling, when you’ve worked in the yard all afternoon and you come in all hot, sweaty, dirty and all you want to do is take a shower. You know it is not just the soap that makes the difference, it is the refreshing that comes from the water. You get out of the shower rejuvenated. Perhaps you also know the feeling of being in the presence of God and the Holy Spirit begins to wash over you, or His presence begins to well up within you like a spring of living water. That river of living water begins to flow in you and through you and over you and a refreshing comes to your soul and spirit. You may be tired and discouraged but one moment in the presence of the Lord, one moment of the Holy Spirit’s touch and you are refreshed, restored, renewed. “Holy Spirit, come wash us, renew us, refresh and restore us!”

Water is required for growth. Water not only is needed to sustain life and to refresh and renew us, water is required for growth. I've watched the toll the sun has taken on the grass and plants in our yard the last couple of weeks. Dry and not much growth, but then the rain comes and quickly things green up and begin to grow again.

Just as water brings life and growth to plant life, so the living water of the Holy Spirit brings life and growth to us. His presence, his work produces the growth of spiritual fruit in our life. The bible identifies that fruit. **“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” Galatians 5:22** If living water is flowing in our life, i.e., if the Holy Spirit is at work in us, he will produce that kind of fruit. He will produce the character of Christ in us. Understand, the work of the Holy Spirit I'm referring to isn't an event, it's a life. This is the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in us, every moment of every day. Just as we can't live without water every day, our grass or plants can't grow and thrive without water every day, we can't live without the Holy Spirit working in our life every day. You can't grow or thrive spiritually without the aid of the Holy Spirit. **“Holy Spirit, cleanse us, refresh and renew us, give us life and produce in us the spiritual growth you desire for us.”**

Let's quickly look at one other symbol. **The Holy Spirit is symbolized by oil.** Oil was used in the anointing of priests, prophets and kings in the Old Testament. It signified the consecration of that person, that they were set apart to God for his use. It also was used to anoint the furniture and the vessels used in the tabernacle of God during the wilderness wanderings and in the temple. Again, it showed those vessels to be consecrated and set apart for God's use.

The anointing oil also came to signify the power and presence of God's Holy Spirit upon the life of that consecrated person. We see this in the life of David when Samuel anointed him to be king. **“So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power.” 1 Samuel 16:13** The oil wasn't magical, it simply was a symbol of the Holy Spirit's anointing upon David.

Oil was associated with anointing and then in turn both became associated with the Holy Spirit's empowerment. As Jesus began his ministry, he quoted the words of the prophet Isaiah, **“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.”** The hearers in Jesus day would have pictured oil being poured on the one set apart for God's service and purpose. Proof of Jesus' anointing was confirmed not just with words but with signs

and wonders and miracle working power! Peter testified that **“God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power...” Acts 10:38** You see how anointing and oil and the Holy Spirit’s power became connected in the thoughts and minds of the people.

As believers, we have been set apart to God for his service. We too have been anointed with a heavenly oil, the Holy Spirit. Paul said, **“Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.” 2 Corinthians 1:21-22.** We need the anointing of the Holy Spirit upon our lives. Anointed, empowered, set apart to accomplish all God has appointed for us to accomplish. We need the oil of the Holy Spirit to be poured out on us fresh and new. **“Holy Spirit, anoint us, set us apart, consecrate us to the Lord’s purpose and service once again!”**

In addition to its use in anointing, **Oil is used to nourish the body.** We cook with oil, using it in a variety of recipes. As olive oil can nourish our body, the Holy Spirit nourishes our soul. The oil of the Holy Spirit fattens us. We often quote the passage from Isaiah that says **“The anointing breaks the yoke”**. The literal translation says the yoke is broken because of fatness. **“The yoke will be broken because you have grown so fat.” Isaiah 10:27** The Holy Spirit’s blessing nourishes us and makes us so healthy (here health and blessing are equated with fatness) so the enemy can’t even get a yoke around our neck or the yoke he had on us is broken off! The Holy Spirit wants to bless your spiritual life, to increase the blessings and knowledge and glory of God in your life. **“Holy Spirit, fatten us up with your glory, your provision, your anointing, your blessing, your power!”**

Oil is used as fuel to burn in a lamp. We talked last week about the Holy Spirit as fire that illuminates and gives warmth. Here is another image of the Spirit’s work.

Oil is used as a beauty aid. The last couple of trips to Israel we have gone to an olive oil factory where they are making all kinds of products that include food and health and beauty aids. In the Old Testament book of Esther, before she was presented to the King and became his queen, Esther was given 12 months of beauty treatments including six months of treatment with oil of myrrh and other perfumes and cosmetics. (Esther 2:12). The oil softened her skin and gave her a beautiful complexion. Likewise, the presence of the Holy Spirit in our life makes us beautiful in character, beautiful in spirit. The Holy Spirit softens our heart and rejuvenates our soul just as the oil softens and rejuvenates the skin. The Holy Spirit is the greatest beauty aid in

the world as he takes what has been hardened and scarred by sin in our life and restores it, making something beautiful out of it.

Oil is used to soothe and heal. The good Samaritan in Jesus' story went to the man who had been beaten and left for dead, bandaged his wounds and the bible says he poured on oil and wine (Luke 10:34). The wine would have cleansed and sterilized while the oil would have soothed and healed the wound. Like the healing oil poured on this man's wounds, I believe the Holy Spirit is present to apply healing to battered and broken bodies and lives. I believe he is here to soothe troubled hearts and spirits and minds. Jesus said the Spirit of the Lord had anointed him to exchange the oil of gladness for the spirit of mourning, to exchange a crown of beauty for ashes. I believe there is an oil of gladness the Holy Spirit wants to give to someone, to exchange the heavy weight of your grief with a lightness of his presence and peace.

I want us to take a moment and ask the Lord to pour that healing oil of the Holy Spirit on us. Some of us desperately need the oil of the Holy Spirit to be poured on the open wounds of our heart, mind and spirit. We need his help. Maybe you've been left like the man who fell among thieves in Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan. You've been beaten by life. Someone robbed you, stole something important from you. You've been left broken, bloody, battered, bruised. Jesus has come to pour in the oil and wine, to heal, restore and refresh you. Let the Holy Spirit do His work today as you open your heart to Him.

“Holy Spirit, rain upon us, refresh us, cleanse us, renew us. Father, pour the healing oil of your Holy Spirit upon the open wounds of our body, mind and spirit today. Give to us the oil of gladness in exchange for the heaviness of our grief and sorrow. Come Holy Spirit and do your work in us today!”