

The Holy Spirit 2017 Part 3

Earth, Wind and Fire

We are continuing our study of the person and work of the Holy Spirit. I mentioned the first Sunday that often the Holy Spirit is represented by symbols like fire, oil, water, wind. Those symbols help us grasp something of how the Holy Spirit operates in our lives. This morning I want to focus specifically on two of those symbols, fire and wind.

The Holy Spirit is symbolized by fire. John the Baptist, in referring to Jesus said, **“I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”** Matthew 3:11-12

The Holy Spirit and fire! Something about that sounds a little alarming doesn't it? Fire! We respond quickly and earnestly when someone yells “fire.” Fire has a powerful effect. It can fuel, purify, destroy. We can be threatened by it, yet at the same time warmed and comforted by it. John says Jesus is going to baptize us with the Holy Spirit and fire. What can that mean?

A few weeks after Jesus was crucified and resurrected he was eating with his disciples and discussing the kingdom. Jesus said to them, **“Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit...[and] you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you...”** Acts 1:4-5, 8. A baptism of fire is coming. The Holy Spirit is coming with power!

Shortly after this Jesus ascends into heaven and the disciples are again left alone, wondering what's next, what will happen? All they know is they were told wait. They gather daily in an upper room, praying and waiting for whatever this gift, this baptism of fire would be when the bible says, **“Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”** Acts 2:2-4

A promise fulfilled. A spiritual baptism in the Holy Spirit. An enduement of power and this symbol -- what appeared to be tongues of fire resting upon them. Fire. Evidence of the work and presence of the Holy Spirit. Consider with me the significance of fire.

The fire of the Holy Spirit brings zeal. What does that mean? We talk about people that are passionate or zealous for God as being “on fire for God”, don’t we? A person that is super motivated to accomplish a task, we might say, “Man, someone lit a fire under him” or “He was on fire!” The Holy Spirit brings a zeal, a passion for Christ as evidenced in Acts 2 when immediately after this baptism a crowd assembled and Peter stood and boldly preached Christ, crucified and risen again. Only weeks before Peter had denied the Lord out of fear, but now, having been baptized in the Holy Spirit and with the fire and zeal of the Holy Spirit upon his life, Peter proclaims Jesus to this once hostile crowd. That boldness and zeal for God and for the life to which he has called us is available from the Holy Spirit.

The fire of the Holy Spirit brings judgment. I said we can be threatened by the presence of fire and we can also be comforted and warmed by it. I think we can find both in this idea of judgment. John the Baptist suggested the fire of the Holy Spirit that Jesus would bring would play a role in judging and burning out sin. The Holy Spirit is a cleansing agent, purifying, sanctifying, burning out impurities that don’t belong in our life, the things that corrupt and diminish our lives. Our physical flesh draws back from a literal fire because it burns. Our sinful nature draws back from the fire of the Holy Spirit because it too burns, but it burns out impurities that are destructive to us and our spiritual life. We pull back but the truth is, we need to lean in to the work of the Holy Spirit. Let the fire of the Spirit burn away everything that keeps us from being pure and clean before the Lord, everything that keeps us from being close to Christ. The Lord said through the prophet, “**I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all your impurities.**” **Isaiah 1:25** Let this be our prayer: “Lord, make our heart and life free of impurity and sin. Make us pure by your grace and the fire of your Spirit!”

The fire of the Holy Spirit illuminates. What a difference fire can make to illuminate the darkness. Just a match can fill a dark room with light. Fire illuminates in the natural realm and the fire of the Holy Spirit illuminates our spiritual life. We see things by the light of the Spirit we never saw before. We see truth we hadn’t seen before as God’s Word comes alive by the work of the Holy Spirit. The fire of the Holy Spirit illuminates and brings the light of revelation. Ask the Holy Spirit to open and illuminate God’s word to your heart and mind.

The fire of the Holy Spirit provides warmth. We warm ourselves by a natural fire and there is that sense in which the presence of the Holy Spirit brings warmth and a sense of comfort and security to us. Jesus said he would not leave us alone but would send the Comforter, the Holy Spirit to be with us, to dwell within us. We are blessed with the continual warmth of his presence in our lives. If you are feeling alone, troubled, grieving, hopeless, keep looking to the comfort and assurance of the Holy Spirit's presence. He is with you in the struggle.

The fire of the Holy Spirit provides power. Jesus said we would receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon us. If you've ever seen the effects of a fire, you know it is powerful. I recall climbing back into the ruins of Frankoma Pottery with my Dad to remove some personal items from his office after an early morning fire destroyed the plant. Massive steel beams had been bent to the ground by the intensity of the blaze. Fire is powerful and can transform and change the shape, the very nature of a thing. Don't imagine that the fire of God's Holy Spirit can't change your life, your character, your nature, your circumstances. Don't imagine the Holy Spirit can't make you a different, better person than you thought. The fire of the Holy Spirit means power! Power to be a witness. Power to accomplish more than you thought possible for the Kingdom of God. Power to serve, power to live for God, power to overcome, power to stand against the forces of the enemy. Power to be all God calls you to be!

The fire of the Holy Spirit melts. We sing the chorus, "Spirit of the living God, fall fresh on me...melt me, mold me, fill me, use me." Fire can melt most any object, given enough time and intensity. I want the fire of the Holy Spirit to melt my will, to melt any resistance I might have toward the work of God in my life. Melt and mold me into what you want me to be!

The fire of the Holy Spirit consumes. When something begins to burn, unless someone intervenes, it will be totally consumed. The bible says, "**Our God is a consuming fire.**"

Hebrews 12:29. The writer of Hebrews is talking about having reverence for God because he is a consuming fire. But I'm talking about being consumed by our love for the Lord. I'm talking about an all-consuming fire of passion for Christ in our lives.

As a teenager I was deeply affected by the story of missionary Jim Elliott, martyred in the jungles of Ecuador at the age of 29. Everyone would do well to read his incredible story told by his widow in the book, *Shadow of the Almighty*. In his journal Jim Elliott wrote, "**God, I pray Thee, light these idle sticks of my life and may I burn for Thee. Consume my life, my God, for it is Thine. I seek not a long life, but a full one, like you, Lord Jesus...Father take my**

life and consume it with Thine enveloping fire...Have it Lord, have it all. Saturate me with the Oil of the Spirit that I may be aflame...Make me thy fuel, Flame of God.” ...Jim Elliott

O that we would be fueled by that kind of passion for Christ! Let this be our prayer: “Holy Spirit, set us ablaze with Holy Fire once again! Consume us with love for you and for your glory!” Not only is the Holy Spirit symbolized by fire....

The Holy Spirit is symbolized by wind and breath. Acts 2 tells us those gathered in the upper room heard what sounded like a rushing mighty wind as the Holy Spirit fell upon them. Jesus said, **“The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” John 3:8.** We can’t see the wind, but we can feel it. We can’t see the Holy Spirit, but we certainly feel him at times. We don’t see the wind but we see its power and its effect. Likewise, we don’t see the Holy Spirit but we see the Spirit’s power and effect upon people’s lives and character.

We don’t control the wind, it blows where it will but a wise sailor can raise the sails and catching that wind can go wherever the wind and sails take him. We don’t control the Holy Spirit, he moves as he pleases and determines, but we can spread our sails as the wind of the Holy Spirit blows and allow Him to carry us wherever he determines. He has a journey mapped out for us and we can trust him to take us there. Sometimes we drop our sails, discouraged, reluctant to respond, hesitating, but what a blessing, what an adventure when we obediently lift our sail to the wind of the Holy Spirit and off we go, under his power and with his guidance. Let this be our prayer: “Holy Spirit, come blow across our lives. We lift our sails to you. Fill them and carry us in your will, wherever you please. We surrender to the wind and direction of your Holy Spirit!”

It is interesting that both the Hebrew and Greek words for spirit *ruach; pneuma* both translate as not only spirit, but also as wind and breath. The Holy Spirit is the breath of God that breathes life into us, into our spirit. I said last week the Spirit of God regenerates and gives life where there once was death. Our spirit, deadened by sin is made alive again through Christ by the power and indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the very life and breath of God.

Turn to **Ezekiel 37** and let’s look at the work of the Holy Spirit in breathing life back into us. Ezekiel is in exile in Babylon, taken there in one of the early deportations, some 12 years before Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 BC. Ezekiel 33:21 says in the twelfth year of his exile a man came from Jerusalem and told him the city had fallen to the Babylonians. Imagine Ezekiel

along with the other exiles hearing the news that their beloved city was no more; the temple had been destroyed, the sacred vessels used in the daily sacrifice had been desecrated and carried off to the storage houses of Nebuchadnezzar, the walls were burned and destroyed. It was utter destruction and no doubt many of their loved ones and countrymen had been killed as well. They were overwhelmed by the news. Everything must have seemed hopeless. If you've seen a movie where a city is destroyed by aliens and only the hero and his girlfriend and a handful of people are left alive, standing there in the rubble, that must have been what it was like in Jerusalem. It seemed everyone was against them including God. It was his judgement that allowed this to happen and justly so because of their sin and rebellion. There was no one to save them. As a nation they were devastated, lost and hopeless.

It was after this news the vision came. The Spirit of the Lord showed Ezekiel a valley full of dry bones. Very dry bones. Skeletons of people long dead, their bones dried up and bleached by the sun as they lay unburied in this valley. The Lord asked Ezekiel, **“Can these bones live?”** There was no more hopeless picture than this. They weren't just mostly dead, they were all dead. Is there any hope? From a human standpoint the answer is “no!” Ezekiel answered, **“O Sovereign Lord, you alone know.”** God told Ezekiel to prophecy to these bones and God said through the prophet, “I will make breath enter you and you will come to life.” As Ezekiel prophesied there was a rattling sound and the bones came together and tendons and flesh appeared but there was no breath or life in them. (Read v4-8) Then God said (v9-10), “Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet – a vast army.”

Then the Lord said to Ezekiel, **“These bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’ Therefore, prophesy and say to them: This is what the Sovereign Lord says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken and I have done it, declares the Lord.”**
Ezekiel 37:11-14

What the people in exile heard was hope. What they heard was God was going to bring them up out of the grave which meant Babylon and bring them back to the land of Israel. God would forgive them and restore them and put his Spirit in them and they would live.

What my father's generation heard and saw was God fulfilling this prophecy in 1948 when Israel was declared a nation and the Jewish people returned to their homeland as they continue to do today. God promised to restore the nation. He did it as the exiles returned in Ezra and Nehemiah's time and he is still doing it today as Jews return to Israel as God's Spirit breathes life into a nation and land that had been dead for centuries.

What I hear today is a message of hope for anyone that feels hopeless, discouraged, exhausted and dead on the inside. What I hear is that nothing is beyond the power of God. He can stand dry bones back on their feet and by His Holy Spirit breathe life back into them and they will live again. Peter Kreeft said, "This is the Spirit that brings to life dead Israel, dead churches, dead legalism, dead liturgy, dead Christians and a dead world: the same Spirit who raised the dead body of Christ." You may be saying the same thing the Israelites said, "Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone. We are cut off." But hear what the Lord is saying today: He is calling the wind of the Holy Spirit to blow upon you, to breathe life into you, to revive you. He is telling you, you will experience life again. What you thought was dead he can make alive. He can revive that marriage, the hopes and dreams you thought were dead and hopeless, the dried up circumstances of your life. God is about to make dry bones stand up on their feet and the Spirit of the Lord is going to breathe life into those situations again.

Can you think of anything more hopeless than a valley of dry bones? Skeletons? Can these bones live again? Ezekiel had the right answer. "O Sovereign Lord, you alone know." God knows and he says they are going to live again. "I will put my Spirit in you and you will live." Can you hear a noise? A rattling sound as the bones come together, as tendons and flesh are coming together? Will you dare to believe the Holy Spirit can ignite a fire in your life and breathe life back into you and your circumstances? That's who he is. That's what he has come to do! "O God, we need your help. Send your Holy Spirit to comfort us, to ignite a fire in us, to restore hope in us, to breathe life back into us. Come Holy Spirit, we need you!"