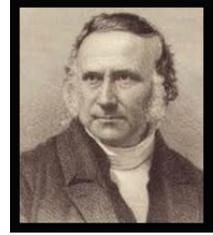


# *Waiting for the Holy Spirit*



Nearly twenty years have now passed away, since I became acquainted with the individual, of whom I am now to speak. I was called upon to preach, in connection with other ministers of the gospel, in a large village, and during the continuance of what was denominated a “protracted meeting.” These meetings had this designation from the fact, that they were continued, from day to day, for several successive days. The exercises usually consisted, in that part of the country, of preaching in the morning, afternoon and evening, with meetings for prayer and religious inquiry, before or after sermon. The sermons were usually preached, by those ministers settled in his vicinity, whom the minister of the church where the meeting was held, had invited for that purpose. At one of these meetings, I preached a sermon on the influences of the Holy Spirit. It was a time of revival in the church; and the truths of the gospel, preached, at such a time, when the Spirit of God was poured out, and when people were peculiarly attentive and solemn, were not likely to be entirely forgotten, even by those who were mere hearers of the word.

Some months after this, as I entered the same village again, on my way from a similar meeting in an adjoining parish, I beheld a crowd of people entering the Town Hall. I inquired the reason, and was told there was “a religious meeting there, that evening, probably a prayer meeting.” I gave my horse into the charge of the hostler at the tavern, and without waiting for tea, mingled with the crowd, and entered the hall. Having already preached three times that day, and conversed with numbers who were seeking the Lord, I was too much wearied to think of doing anything more; and therefore endeavored to keep out of the sight of the clergyman,

by taking a back seat, and leaning down my head. My attempt was in vain. He discovered me, and requested me to come forward to the desk. I preached a short sermon, the people dispersed, and I went with the clergyman to his home.

We were not seated in the parlor, before a servant entered, and said, a lady in the hall wished to see me. I immediately stepped into the hall, and a very genteel woman, about forty years of age, addressed me, with evident agitation:

“I beg your pardon for troubling you to-night, sir, but I cannot help it. I have longed to see you ever since .you preached here in August. I have often felt that I would give anything to see you, for even five minutes. I have prayed for that privilege. And when I saw you in the Town Hall to-night, I was so rejoiced that I could hardly remain in my seat; and I determined to follow you when you went out, till I got a chance to speak with you.”

“I am very glad to see you, Madam; but I suspect you have taken all this trouble in vain.”

“Why, sir, cannot you talk with me one minute? cannot you answer me one question?” said she, her eyes overflowing with tears.

“Certainly, certainly, Madam; I can talk with you as long as you please to favor me with your company, and will answer any questions you choose to ask, as well as I can; but I suspect you need an aid which I cannot give you.”

“Sir, I want only one thing of you. I want you to tell me how I shall procure the Holy Spirit. I have wanted to ask you this question for months. If you will only tell me, I will not intrude myself upon you any longer.”

(Entirely overcome with her emotions, she wept like a child.)

“Intrude! my dear lady. This is no intrusion. I am glad to see you. I thank you, with all my heart for coming to me. I beg you to do me the justice to believe it, and feel yourself perfectly at ease. Ask me anything, or tell me anything you will, with entire freedom. I will not abuse your confidence.”

She stood before me, trembling and weeping, as if her heart would break. And as she aimed to repress her emotions, and removed her handkerchief from her eyes, the light of the hall-lamp shone full upon her face, and I was surprised at the deep solemnity and determination, which appeared in one of the most intelligent and beautiful countenances, that I ever beheld.

At this instant the lady of the house, perceiving the nature of our conversation, invited us into a private room. My new acquaintance told me who she was, and repeated the cause of her calling upon me. I asked her some questions, and conversed with her for some minutes, for the purpose of ascertaining more exactly the state of her mind, and adapting my words accordingly. Her intelligence and the elegance of her language surprised me. She was in middle life, a married woman, having a husband still living, and two small children. Her husband was not a pious man; and her thoughts about her own salvation had led her to think much of his, and of the duty owed to her children. Her first serious impressions arose from the thought, that, not being a member of the church, she could not dedicate her children to God in the ordinance of baptism; and this led her to think, that in her unbelief she could not fitly train them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

“Oh! sir,” said she; (the tears streaming from her eyes, and her sensations almost choking utterance;) “I would give all the world, to be a

Christian! I know I am a sinner, an undone sinner! I have a vile and wicked heart. I have sinned all my life! I wonder God has spared me so long!”

“But he has spared you, Madam; when you did not deserve it. And what has he spared you for, but that you should repent of sin and flee to Christ for pardon?”

“I would repent, if I could. I want to be a Christian. But my hard, wicked heart is stronger than I! For years I have read my Bible, and struggled and prayed; and it has done me no good! I am afraid I shall be cast off forever! God has not given me his Spirit!”

“I too am afraid you will be cast off forever! Probably your danger is greater, than you think! But there is mercy in Christ for the chief of sinners. His blood cleanseth from—”

“I know it, sir; I know all that, from my Bible. I have read it a thousand times. But I cannot come to Christ without the Holy Spirit.”  
“Madam, the text is plain, ‘if ye being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to—”

“But I am not one of his children, sir.”

“The text does not say, to his children, my dear Madam; it says, ‘to them that ask him’ ‘Ask and ye shall receive.’”

“Oh! I have prayed—I do pray.”

“Allow me to ask you, Madam, how long you have been in this state of mind?”

“About three years. I was first brought to think of my salvation, soon after the birth of my first child; when my duty to my family led me to feel the need of religion. I could not have it baptized, for I was not a member of the church; and what troubled me more, I could not do my duty to it, for I was not a child of God.”

“And have you been accustomed, for so long a time, to read your Bible carefully?” “Oh! I have read it all, again and again! I read it daily. I have prayed and wept over this subject, for long years! and have waited for the Holy Spirit to renew my heart.” “And have you been waiting for the Holy Spirit for three years, in this state of mind?”

“Indeed, sir, I have.”

“Then, for three years, you have been waiting for what God gave you three years ago. It was the Holy Spirit, which first led you to feel you were a sinner and needed Christ. The Holy Spirit has been striving with you all along, and you did not know it. He led you to the Bible. He led you to prayer. He sent you here to-night. He strives with you now, to lead you to Christ for forgiveness and peace.”

“Do you think so?” said she with astonishment.

“I know so,” said I. “God has been better to you, than you have thought. He has done what you have never given him credit for. He has called, and you have refused. He has invited, and you have held back. You thought you must not come, and could not. You may, on the spot. The Holy Spirit has not left you yet. I wonder that he has not; but you have another call tonight. And now, Madam; accept his invitation; repent; take Christ as your Saviour. Go home and give your heart to God, just as it is. You cannot make it better. The Holy Spirit is with you. Do not resist him any longer. You have stayed away from Christ, because you supposed you must. You wanted the Holy Spirit first; and thought you must not come

to Christ, till your heart was better. The dispensation of the Spirit is in his hands. Go to the fountain. The Bible nowhere tells you to wait for the Holy Spirit; but, fleeing to Christ, to depend on his aid now.”

“Pardon me, sir; I must ask you again, if you really think, the Holy Spirit is striving with me?”

“Yes, my dear friend, I know he is. He has been for years. He offers you his aid. He calls you to Christ now. Go to Christ. Repent tonight. Accept and rest on Christ now. The Holy Ghost saith, ‘To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart.’”

“And is that all you have to say to me, about the Holy Spirit?”

“Yes, that is all. The Holy Spirit this moment strives with you. God is willing to save you. Nothing but your own unbelief and irrepentance can ruin you.”

“Has the Spirit been striving with me?—and I did not know it?” (said she, in the manner of meditation, the tears streaming from her eyes.)—She left me, and returned to her-home.

Early the next morning, before the sun rose, as I looked from my window, I beheld her coming through the thick dew which lay upon the grass, with hasty steps ascending the hill, on which the house where I lodged was situated. She asked for me at the door, and I immediately met her in the parlor.

“I thank you my dear friend, I thank you a thousand times for telling me that;” (said she, the moment she saw me; her eyes streaming with tears and her countenance beaming with joy.) “It was all true. I have found it true. I can rejoice in Christ now. I am happy, sir, oh, I am happy. I thought I must come and thank you. I am afraid you will think me rude,

in calling upon you at such an hour. But I was afraid you would be gone, if I delayed; and I could not let you leave town without telling you how happy I am, and how much I thank you. After I heard you preach, three months since, I thought you could tell me something about obtaining the gift of the Holy Spirit, and when I asked you about it last night, I was very much disappointed by what you said. I was amazed and confounded. You did not say what I expected. But I believed you. I spent the night over this subject. Happy night for me! And now, I know you told me the truth. You read my heart rightly. I bless God for what I have found. Pardon me, sir; I must ask you, to tell other sinners, that Christ is waiting for them. They do not know it, I am sure, any more than I did; or they would go to him. The Holy Spirit calls us to do so. With all my glad heart, I yield to him. I do not wait any longer. I bless you for telling me, I Deed not wait.” Weeping for joy, she continued to talk to me in this manner, for some minutes.

I have not seen her since. But I have learned, that she publicly professed her faith, and has lived for years, as a reputable and happy believer.

Probably the influences of the Holy Spirit are more common with impenitent sinners, than they suppose. Such persons greatly err, when, instead of fleeing at once to Christ; they wait, and think they must wait, for some attainment first. Their waiting for it, is but a deceptive excuse; and if they suppose they have gained any attainment and on that ground Christ has accepted them; their religion is only self-righteousness and delusion. A broken heart is invited to the balm of Gilead. “Tell other sinners that Christ is waiting for them.”

The subtlety of the adversary is wonderful. The want of the Holy Spirit was this woman’s obstacle. The devil had led her to believe, that she was forsaken of the Spirit; and if she was, she knew from the Bible, that there was no other help for her. Instead of going to Christ, therefore, in

faith; she miserably supposed, that she must wait. She did not know, that the very urgency and influence of the Holy Spirit consist in bringing sinners to embrace Jesus Christ, as he is offered to us in the gospel. The very thing that God wanted her to do, was the very thing that she supposed she must not do; and thus she was compelled to wait in darkness and fear, by a subtle device of the adversary.—It is important for convicted sinners to know, that the cause of their irreligion is not, that Christ is not willing to receive them, but that they are not willing to trust in him.