

Life is in the Spirit

Richard Dawson, 19 May 2013.

What's life like for you at the moment? Hard work? Heavy? Has the fun gone out of it? Do you feel that what you once had is gone? Perhaps you long for something more, something you imagined life could be, would be if only you had **something else**, something you know about or perhaps something mysterious, something you don't know about.

I think most of us struggle for periods of our life, perhaps even for long periods, to feel that life really is what we want it to be. Even those of us who are happy now and for whom life is full – we will either know a time in our past when we struggled or we will know such a time in the future. And, you know, I'm not trying to be a doom-sayer here. I don't want to make you sad this morning but this is just the nature of life. Life just isn't, always, what we'd like it to be and the Bible knows this to be the case. A long time ago a writer of philosophy, a man of faith, wrote these words about his life...

¹The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem:

²“Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.”

³What does anyone gain from all their labors at which

they toil under the sun?

⁴Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever.

⁵The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises.

⁶The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course.

⁷All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again.

⁸All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing. (Eccles 1)

Life is not as it should be friends. Yes we live with some incredible joys in an incredible world but there is darkness. The Bible knows there should be more to life and throughout the OT that search for this life goes on until we get to Jesus...

Jesus makes some incredible statements about life. One of them is that life isn't about simply being born and our growth from this point on. Rather, He says, real life begins with something completely different, something completely other, and that something is God's Spirit.

⁵Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water

and Spirit. ⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.'⁸The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”⁹Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” ¹⁰Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? (John 3)

Whatever your conception of really living is, Jesus has a word for you; **Not without the Spirit!** The Holy Spirit brings real life because only the Holy Spirit can bring Jesus to us and He said...

^{10a}**I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.**
(John 10)

The life which the human spirit seeks and knows must be there **is there**... in the person of Jesus. And that life which Jesus offers us comes only one way... **by the Spirit**. Without the Spirit we cannot participate in the life of Christ. Without the Spirit we cannot know real life! But what does this mean?

It means two things – two very clear and scripturally identifiable things...

1. Word
2. Power

Life in the NT consists of these two things. Word and Power. Word denotes meaning. Real life has real meaning. Many people who end up despairing their life do so because even though they have everything that money can buy and often much that money can't buy their life **has no meaning**. You and I were made to live lives of meaning. We were made to stand for something much bigger than ourselves. A word has meaning because it stands for something else – it is used to denote something else and when it does the whole of that word points to that things. When I use the word 'sun' I use a word which points to the thing from which all life has been derived. When I say 'sun' I denote something which weighs 330,000 times the earth, which burns at 15.6 million K at its centre and which loses 10 million tonnes of mass per second. It is so big that if it could keep burning all its mass at this rate it would still take 6000 billion years to disappear. All that... in a word...

We are made to live lives of meaning – to point to something so much bigger than ourselves and we can do so – but only by the Spirit

Life in the scripture is also about power. Jesus' life is marked by deeds of power. This is what really woke the people up to who He was. The first thing Jesus does for those who believe in Him is to give them power – power to live new lives.

¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. (John 1)

For our life to have meaning we must have the power to live it. Many start down glorious roads only to find they haven't got the power to keep going. And if we're truthful the fact is that we haven't got the power to be the children God's intends we should be – at least we haven't got that power within ourselves. We need it to be given to us. Who gives us meaning and purpose and power to really live? Thanks be to the Spirit of God. This is what the Holy Spirit does. The Spirit will give us these things if we will only ask for them and be ready to receive from God. How does this happen?

1. The Spirit brings us the living Word of Christ – the immediate word, the word of wisdom, the word of caution, the word of insight, the word of comfort.

When Jesus leaves He specifically says that the job of the Spirit is to **remind the disciples** of what... **'of everything I have said.'**

²⁶But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. (John 14)

By this will we be able to apply God's Word to every situation we encounter. By this will we know the Truth. By this will we gain insight for the specific situations which each of us will experience in our lives because the Spirit will bring to us not just the Words of Jesus but, indeed, the Word – Jesus Himself.

In the Sacred Museum of the Vatican, there is a sixteenth-century sculpture by Gian Lorenzo Bernini entitled "Habakkuk and the Angel." In this masterpiece, Habakkuk is holding a packed bag, as if

he is traveling somewhere, and his movement is forward, as if he is walking ahead. However, his movement is impeded by an angel hovering above him, who has grabbed this startled prophet by the hair, as if lifting him to heaven. This is what the Spirit does. The Spirit brings to us God's living Word if we are prepared to be interrupted. The question is, are we prepared to be interrupted for the Spirit's work will always feel like an interruption to us.

Allow the Spirit to interrupt your lives friends. Allow the Spirit to pull your hair for when you do suddenly your life will begin to have true meaning. Stop making all the plans for your life. Seek instead the Word of God.

2. Secondly, the Spirit brings to us the power of Christ. What is that power? It is the power of faith. It is faith that moves things, answers requests, heals wounds – and it is by the Spirit that we receive faith.

The Spirit and power are intimately connected in the NT but what is the nature of this power. It is manifest in many different ways but it is always associated with faith. Indeed it is only through faith that the power of God works.

By faith do Abraham and Sarah conceive Isaac. By faith does Israel escape the Egyptian army. By faith does David defeat Goliath and by faith do Mary and Joseph parent the boy Jesus and prepare the way for Him to be revealed as the Son of God. The Church is established through faith and achieves all that God has for it by faith. We cannot please God except through faith but faith comes by the Spirit.

If we look briefly at the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost we see that there is a clear connection between the Word of God, the work of the Spirit and faith. Word – Faith – Spirit – Power. It goes like this... Jesus in one of his last appearances before His resurrection gives the disciples a specific command – a living Word – which is to stay in Jerusalem and wait until the Spirit comes...

⁴While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. “This,” he said, “is what you have heard from me; ⁵for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” (Acts 1)

They obey this specific word in faith which leads them to the outpouring of the Spirit – something miraculous and powerful with they could not have produced. From this point on however we have a slightly different dynamic which, most often, goes like this – Spirit – Word – Faith – Power. In the case of the conversion of Saul to Paul Ananias demonstrates this well. Ananias receives a vision of Jesus while sleeping. We know from Joel that visions are things that the Spirit brings. That vision produces a Word which Ananias reluctantly obeys in faith meeting Saul and eventually praying for him which releases power in the form of a miracle of recovered sight. The same thing happens to Peter in the case of the Gentiles receiving the Gospel. Peter receives a vision by the Spirit which carries a Word which he obeys in faith, again very reluctantly. This

leads to him preaching to Gentiles which releases an outpouring of the Spirit amongst them – power.

God intends us to really live. The Spirit brings new life by Word and by Power but the question is, are we prepared to **receive the Spirit**? This is the great new command after Pentecost – receive the Spirit. Are we prepared to hear God's Spirit? If you are I want to pray for you today. Can we stand? Just agree with this prayer friends and let's see what God will do in us and through us in the next wee while.