

# The Spiritual & The Material World

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[ 0 : 00 ] We're talking about the person and work of the Holy Spirit. And we talked about the day of Pentecost, which was marked by something that seemed like wind and something that looked like fire and words that were communicated, words that those three things were characteristic of the Holy Spirit.

And this was the beginning of something brand new in the history of the people of God. And it all began with the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came.

And these three things were the peculiar accompaniments to that moment in history in which the Holy Spirit was given to the church so that the church became from that moment on the fellowship of the Holy Spirit so that when you are baptized into the church, you become a member of the community of the Holy Spirit.

When you believe in Christ, you are gifted with the Holy Spirit. And so that those were the things that happened. Well, then last week I went and told the story.

I have a feeling we're going to run out of papers soon. So I'll just... You remember the man who... The unnamed servant who went and traveled back to find a wife for Rebecca.

[ 1 : 57 ] And the fact that in that whole story, anybody who observed the history would not have seen that underlying it all was a dynamic work of the Holy Spirit.

You saw an old man covenanting with his servant who took the camels, who traveled to a far country, a girl who came out and gave water to him and watered her camels.

He went to the house. He enjoyed the hospitality. He exchanged the bridal gifts, which were the customary things that belonged to a wedding and the giving of a bride.

And then he returned with the bride to meet her husband. And they were married and lived happily ever after. Not quite as happily as you might think, but nevertheless, it was pretty good.

But there was nothing visible on the surface that anybody couldn't have seen any day in the whole span of history. And yet, as the story is told, you can't but be excited by the dynamic of the work of the Holy Spirit, the unnamed servant who accomplishes things, and the prayer and the worship and the recognition that what was happening was a God fulfilling the promises of his covenant.

[ 3 : 26 ] So you get the kind of invisible reality of the work of the Holy Spirit. And that invisible reality is the reality which we live in touch with.

Well, that's the first two days. And what questions has that raised in your mind? Can you, have any of you got sort of questions that you would like to ask about how far we've gone and what we've done?

I know that most of you are being polite because you know that I won't have the answer, so you're not asking the question.

But even if I don't have the answer, the question might be quite helpful. One question, Harry.

You can count on Joan. Good. Did Abraham, did he tell his servant out of his own mind, or was he sort of impaled to do it?

[ 4 : 55 ] Was it the Holy Spirit first? Well, I read a great line this morning that's an answer to that, which suggests, I mean, what I think is one of the dynamic principles of the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit.

You don't look for the Spirit. You look to the Word, and then the Spirit works. So that the promise that Abraham had been given, that his children would be as the stars of the sky.

So he expected, he anticipated that God, in accordance with his promise, would provide for him.

And so when he was an old man, he didn't spend his time looking back at the good old days.

He looked at the promises of God, which said, Isaac needs a wife. That's one of the practical necessities of the promise of God. And so he sent for a wife back to the land from which he'd come.

And it occurred to me when I was telling this story downtown yesterday that what Rebecca did was not unlike what Abraham had done in the first place.

[ 6 : 14 ] You know, when the Lord had come to him from in his own, among his own family, among his own culture, in his own civilization, in the Mesopotamian world, in a particular point in geography, which he knew, and he was told, go west, man, go west.

And he went west to the promised land. And now this bride was given a similar call from God to go west, to leave her family, to leave her culture, to leave all that she'd known, to go into a completely strange world and be the wife to a completely strange man in obedience to what seemed to be the ordering of the purpose of God.

And so I think Abraham was acting in accordance with the promise. God had given the promise and the way the promise was to be fulfilled would inevitably, because Abraham had been told that what was going to happen was going to happen through the child of promise who was Isaac.

And so I think that you would have to say that he had been told that that was what was going to happen. And therefore he was looking for that.

And you see, the other big thing about that, which I found very helpful when I was thinking some more about it after I talked to you last week, was that, was the, was the fact that, you know, the Bible is, you know, it's, I mean, it's very helpful.

[ 7 : 52 ] I mean, we talk about the Serbs and the Croats and the, Croats and the, and the Tamils and the, uh, IRA and the, uh, you know, we talk about people in great groupings of people, you know, we talk about white Anglo-Saxon Protestants and we talk about, uh, you know, the Jewish people and all those kinds of things.

And we tend to identify people with the group to which they belong and the kind of mysterious personality or characteristics of that group and, uh, all that belongs to them. Uh, it's very interesting, isn't it, that the whole of the history of the people of God finds expression in a series of biographies of individuals so that you have Adam and Eve you have Noah and Abraham you have Isaac and Jacob and Joseph you have, uh, Moses and Joshua and, uh, the whole history of this people is summed up in the person of their king so that they, the prosperity to a people is the prosperity of their king which they share and which they enjoy so that, uh, that's a helpful thing

I think to think about and to understand because, uh, we are the people of the Lord Jesus Christ and our supreme concern is how he is honored and how he is prospered and how he is treated and whatever accident of genealogy has produced the likes of you and me uh, the concern of our life is the person of Jesus Christ and, uh, that, uh, I, I found that very helpful to see how God worked in that way through people.

Anybody else got any questions you want to ask or suggestions you want to make or? Well, Harry, you have been referring to the Holy Spirit and the era in which you have been dealing is the Old Testament era.

Uh-huh. Now, most of this when we talk of the Holy Spirit we think of it in the terms of the Trinity and, uh, that is at the time of Jesus and his death and the resurrection.

[ 10 : 51 ] coming to the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit is who you were from and the first in theology is that the same Holy Spirit that is part of the Trinity?

Yes. Yes. Uh, and, uh, and, and really that's the subject of my talk today.

So, I think you, you put your, your finger on it so to speak so that before I go to that I'll going, going, let's bow our heads.

our God and Father we come to your word written in a book ink on pages but we come to this word not just as a kind of product of sophisticated technology but as that means by which you have chosen to speak to us you introduce us to Abraham in order that we may know the God of Abraham.

and you introduce us to these words written in order that we may encounter your words spoken and that we may receive it as a word to us in the particular circumstances of each of our lives in the midst of creatures of flesh and blood wanting to know how it is in your purpose that we are called to be the temple of your Holy Spirit.

[ 13 : 22 ] So guide and direct us as we turn our minds and hearts to your word we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Now the passage that I want you to look at is Genesis chapter 1 verse 1 and following.

So if that's the very first page of the Bible so it's one of the easier ones to find. And and the picture that I want you to have is this which I have drawn with great precision and I'm serious about that because this represents without form and void.

And so you can see that I have illustrated it well. And then you have in this picture from Genesis chapter 1 you have the words which say let me get there now now the earth was formless and empty darkness was over the surface of the deep and the spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

So at the very beginning of creation you have this encounter between the chaos of the material world and the life giving ordering sustaining power of God the Holy Spirit the spirit of God and so right at the beginning you have that picture and that's the picture that continues on and on and on through history that the chaos the formlessness the emptiness and the darkness and into that comes the spirit of God and that that all of us experience this I mean it's we find ourselves in the pit in in the you know what are ways we just use to describe being in here as we talk about being in the pit but you know that chaos has taken over and you get this thing and then you get so that in a sense you have you know the kind of power at work in our world which seems to be driving us back into the void back into chaos back into formlessness back into meaninglessness that that's there this is this is the dominion of darkness here and then up over against that is the power and purpose and sustaining work of

God the Holy Spirit so that's that's a very powerful picture isn't it and that's that's where we we live our lives you know and sometimes people think that progress is moving that way and others think progress is moving that way you know that's that's what's happening in our society at the moment is that that there is there's called there's a thing called deconstructionism and all the constructs by which civilization has sought to rise out of the mire and out of the pit those have been have are considered in our postmodern world to be of no effect and that that they have to be scrambled again and we have to return to the chaos in order that there might be something new come out of it so you get you get this this powerful biblical picture right in verse 2 of of the contrast between the formlessness and the void and the work of

[18:10] God the Holy Spirit and you see that that that the work of God the Holy Spirit then is is to create you know is to bring order out of this and that and that this work goes on and on and on in every generation and every century you know I think the biggest difficulty about the seven day creation that we talk about is the is the conclusion that we live with most of our lives that God finished the world several thousands of years ago or millions whatever you want and that we've been getting along without him ever since you know but this is the constant reality that that marks every year in history every point in time is this this reality here and that's the the spirit of God moving on the face of the deep the formlessness and the void and the darkness and and the spirit of God at work to accomplish his purposes well then what happens is that you get you get a whole lot of wonderful pictures of how how this process takes place it's uh uh one of the things that Derek Kidner said in his commentary which which which I thought was very helpful in which uh

I want to to remind you of because I think it uh is that uh the Holy Spirit represents here God's intimate involvement with his creation you know he's not somewhere away and some vast computer headquarters is pushing buttons but that he is by his spirit involved immediately and imminently and intimately in the whole ordering of creation the whole of sustaining of creation and that's a powerful biblical picture you know we have I think distanced God and put him back in heaven or back somewhere far beyond but from the beginning the picture is God's intimate involvement with his creation and you get you get that picture there then you you begin to get uh uh ideas about the spirit you know and and the uh you remember it the spirit is called you know is talked of in terms of wind and in terms of fire and in terms of breath and uh that that and that you know breath is the is a very intimate process on which our lives depend you know you know and it's uh it's a kind of immaterial process it's uh uh it was uh

I we we think of it as you know air air seems mysterious and intangible you know we know that it's got to be there but but at the same time it it seems to be somewhat different than the the order of physical being that we're used to I was shaken the other day by uh one of the professors out at UBC telling me that he was down to an exhibit in some place down in the states where they manufacture airplane engines and they've got a new jet engine that will consume a ton and a half of air a minute can you imagine what a ton and a half of air looks like it's uh you know it's I mean it's almost an impossible concept where would you get the scales to weigh it for instance but that was

how they described it so it's a it's a fascinating sort of picture of of the reality of of the spiritual and the material locking together in

God's in God's plan and in God's purpose and that that's what happened so you get you get that that sense if you were if you were to look at Judges 310 this is just an example almost an arbitrary example but it it's one that makes you aware of the spiritual elements that are part of life in verse in verse 9 but when they cried out to the Lord he raised up for them a deliverer Othniel who was the son of Canaz Caleb's younger brother who saved them so here is a particular individual man in a moment in history who becomes the instrument of God's purpose to save his people and it says of him in verse 10 the spirit of the

Lord came upon him so that he became Israel's judge and he went to war so you see that how the spirit of God possesses an individual man to give him the wisdom to be the judge and the courage and moral fortitude to lead the people to war so you get a it's just a picture of the spiritual reality the spiritual dimension now that may be not a particularly appropriate picture for you but it is an important picture because it suggests how the holy spirit invades our lives if you turn to well then I'll just go over it briefly so that you can remember remember from

[ 24 : 46 ] Joel the thing that the famous passage that is always read on Pentecost Sunday you know that how does it go somebody tell me remember how the prophet Joel said the spirit will be poured out upon all flesh what in the last days yeah that this spirit would come on all people something which was anticipated by the Old Testament but Jack born not experienced in the Old Testament you know that it was and then you have that wonderful picture in Ezekiel of the valley of the dry bones and if you were to look at that in Ezekiel chapter 37 you know them bones them bones them dry bones and just look at how the story is written up and how it's understood and then verse nine where it says then he said to me prophesy to the breath prophesy son of man and say to it that is what the sovereign

Lord says come from the four winds breath breathe into these slain that they may live so I prophesied as he commanded and breath entered them and they came to life and stood on their feet a vast army so you begin to see how God is present in the whole work of creation by his spirit God is present in our individual lives sustaining us the way our breath sustains us you know when you're out of breath you're out and and that how God by his spirit becomes the very source of life so that what happens and I I can remember telling you this before but it it may serve to tell you again the way the way the

Bible does it is it talks about the spirit and what the spirit does is it energizes materializes writing upside down and backwards is hard work so that you get this is this is the way the Bible looks at it it says that there is spirit which energizes which materializes you know we know we know a lot about this process from here to here because somebody discovered that E equals MC squared we know a lot about this but we don't know very much about this and so that you know that the biblical understanding of our world is that the basic reality is spirit that the spirit moves in power creating energy and energy creates the material reality well you know that that we are known as materialists and we say this is all there is and what you know because we say this is all there is we come in a sense to sanctify this as the ultimate reality and of course as human beings we have we have a kind of material being which is made up of flesh and blood and a very complex process sustains our material being and I and I think the concept of euthanasia is is in a sense a materialist concept and that is that you you want to the material process has broken down so badly that you don't want to sustain it any longer and it seems logical to terminate it you know but the difficulty with that is that material the material reality is only a manifestation of a basic spiritual reality and that what our life is all about has to do with something spiritual now

I think I have to go on because I feel I'm going to get trapped here by saying this unless I use this illustration you see which I hope is helpful but material you know it's measurable it's hard it's weighable it's there it is it's solid stuff and over in here we have spiritual reality something ghostly something abnormal something way outside of the hard rock material experience of our life spiritual things are kind of spooky things that sort of hover around the fringes of our essentially material being we are material creatures in a material world with material concerns who accumulate material even though we know that one of the problems of the material world is in those illustrious words of somebody or other you can't take it with you it's not transportable and where you're going it doesn't go and so that's the kind of world in which in which we live we live in this kind of material world and you know we go in for teacup reading and crystal ball gazing and various idiotic behavior to try and

see if we can somehow reach out and touch another reality which we call spiritual but even the very fact that we want to touch it means that we think it's material and it's not and that's the you know that's the problem that I think that we have and that's why

I think that it's that's where our world I think is very confused when you start to talk about the Holy Spirit people say so what you know that's somewhere in the outer you know somewhere in the outer space and the thing that that you have to come back to is that this is the reality and this is the localized manifestation of the ultimate reality of the spirit and that's why when we talk about a person we talk about them not ultimately as body but ultimately as soul that we're talking about somebody's spiritual the reality that the spiritual reality of a person locked as we are in time and space in this physical body but nevertheless in touch with the reality which is

[ 33 : 22 ] God the Holy Spirit and that's that's why we have to I think look at look at the at the scriptures anew and try and understand them and when you try to understand the scriptures what happens is is this I think that you you have the physical reality of Jesus who became flesh who became material who bore our sins in his body on the tree who was put in the tomb dead and who rose from the tomb on the third morning and then you see the Holy

Spirit is given so that the death of Christ in a sense covers as it were our commitment to and obligation to the material world that's finished our life is now concerned with one who has risen from the dead so that something brand new begins this is a new covenant this is a new life this is a new understanding and now the Holy Spirit is given to the church to animate the church or to give life and breath to the church to the community of Christ's people in order that they may live out not the physical reality but the spiritual reality that they may live in touch with the reality of the kingdom and that that process is

I think that's why Jack Bourne in the Old Testament you see the sporadic in a sense intervention of the spirit you see the intervention of the spirit in this in this man in this situation you see the spirit acting in this way but now the Holy Spirit becomes the basis of a new reality the reality of the kingdom they thought that the kingdom was going to come in terms of we thought it was he that would rule Israel they thought it was going to come in some kind of material manifestation in a material world but what it is it's a spiritual reality which is based in the material world but which goes beyond it and that's why you have this sequence if you want of how

Joel says I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh that this is the new reality that we're to be in touch with and this is why there is for us and for our world a kind of conflict between the material reality which we are very familiar with and by which we seek to explain everything and things that we can't explain in material terms we tend to think are peripheral and meaningless to human beings while in fact what scripture says is that the ultimate reality is that reality which is beyond our material being so that what what happens in terms of human life is that we move that

God in the beginning created and sustained our world by his Holy Spirit which manifests itself in energy which creates material being which then dissolves into energy if you put  $MC^2 = E$  and then which becomes spiritual in other words that that is the reality of the biblical concept of who we are as people and that's why you know it underlies all the debate about euthanasia all the debate about abortion all the debate about the meaning and purpose of life all the debate about our sexuality and so on everything is it tends to be debated within within the parameters of our material being that's all there is and the conflict comes because the Bible seems to teach that there is a lot more than that and that that is just a particular manifestation that's why

[ 39 : 01 ] Paul you see in his thing in Corinthians says what eye has not seen and ear has not heard and the mind of man has not even imagined those things which God has prepared for us by his spirit that this is the that the holy spirit is the ultimate reality and that what he intends for us is that we should be in touch with him that we should live by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ the love of God in the fellowship of the holy spirit and that that's the way that's the way our life is put together and that's what God has called us to that's why

God breathes into these dead bones the breath which brings them to life that's why God pours out his spirit on all flesh because he wants us to be aware that that our our material involvement which is part of our participation in God's creation is part of our lives but it's only part and that the spiritual reality is is what it ultimately is all about well I gotta stop but I'm I would be very grateful if you think about it and have if you have any questions if you'll ask me about them and bring bring next week the questions that you may have let's pray father we acknowledge that we do live in a very material kind world and that the primary problems of our existence seem to stem from our material being we

are creatures of flesh and blood we very much sense that we are like a valley of dry bones baked by the sun and getting harder and drier all the time and we are strangers to the reality of your Holy Spirit Spirit of love and of truth and of grace Holy Spirit that frees and liberates the Holy Spirit that brings joy and praise the Holy Spirit in the fellowship of whom we we know you through the fellowship of whom we are in communion and in communication with you by that work of your Holy Spirit in us and among us we are sanctified by you in that same Holy Spirit we are created and sustained for obedience to you so our  
God free us from the burden of our material existence by a heightened awareness of that fellowship of the Holy Spirit which you have opened to us through the death and resurrection of your son  
Jesus Christ Amen