

Text: John 1:32-33, 20:22-23

Title: "The Spirit in John" – Part One

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Introduction: We have noted before that the Gospel of John is unique among the four Gospels. Each of the Gospels has its unique qualities, but the first three Gospels are referred to as the Synoptic Gospels because of their similarities. *Synoptic* means *viewing-together*, and Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called that because they seem to view together the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

John, on the other hand, is never called one of the Synoptic Gospels. His view of the ministry of Christ, likely written after the wide circulation of the first three Gospels, provides much supplementary material not found in the first three Gospels. This was obviously important to John's purpose.

One intersection between the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John, however, is that John begins with a description of the baptism of Christ, like the others do. Interestingly, John does not actually mention the baptism of Jesus as he recounts the event, but rather he focuses on the baptizer, especially that John the Baptist saw the Holy Spirit descending on Christ like a dove (John 1:32-33). Matthew (3:16) and Luke (3:22) also mention the dove.

There are some obvious reasons why the dove is a suitable symbol for the Lord to choose to make the Holy Spirit's descent on Jesus visible. The bright white feathers of a dove adequately portray the purity of the Holy Spirit. The gentle beauty of a dove reminds us of the qualities of the fruits of the Holy Spirit in a sanctified life – love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, faithfulness, and temperance (Gal. 5:22-23). The ability of the dove to fly away

reminds us of the Holy Spirit's incorporeal existence, without physical form. The Psalmist prays, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest." (Ps. 55:6). We must be careful not to grieve or quench the Holy Spirit's work in us. He is very sensitive to our response to Him.

Perhaps less obvious are the Scriptural reasons the dove provides a perfect symbol of the Holy Spirit. There are at least three of these. In the creation account, Gen. 1:2 tells us about the Holy Spirit's role in the beginning: "and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." That word *moved* refers to the fluttering of a bird caring for its young in Deut. 32:11. The creation account pictures the Holy Spirit's role as a dove-like bird. A dove reminds us that the Holy Spirit is Creator.

We first see an actual dove in our Bibles after the global flood of Noah in Gen. 8:8. Noah sent out a dove to see if the waters of God's judgment had subsided sufficiently for them to exit the ark and begin anew, and it is the dove who returned to Noah with an olive branch, announcing the end of God's wrath and the beginning of a new era of peace. When the Holy Spirit enters a life, He brings the end of God's wrath and the beginning of a new era of peace with God.

And finally, we see the dove and turtledoves in the law of Moses as the one bird that Israelites were to permitted to use in their sacrifices. They could do so when they could not afford a spotless lamb. Jesus's family had to resort to this option when they offered sacrifices. And so the dove made the sacrifice accessible to the desperately poor. And that is what the Holy Spirit does for the poor sinner. He makes the sacrifice of Christ assessable to him so that he can be saved.

But there is a difference in the Johannine account of the baptism of Christ that is easily missed but important to the purpose of John's Gospel. You will remember that this purpose

is that the readers of this Gospel, you and I, might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing we might have life through His name (20:31).

John wants us to believe that Jesus is the Christ, and *Christ* means *Messiah* or *Anointed One*. The OT looked for the coming of the Anointed One, the perfect Prophet, Priest, and King, all offices in Israel which were anointed with olive oil. The Messiah's olive oil would be the Holy Spirit: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Isa. 61:1-2a).

John wants us to understand that this anointing of the Messiah happened at Jesus's baptism. There the Son of God was anointed Christ, to be the Prophet, Priest, and King of our salvation by the grace of God. And so, unlike all the other accounts of Jesus's baptism, the account of John's Gospel tells us twice that the Holy Spirit remained on Jesus (1:32-33). John the Baptist testified that Jesus is the Christ, the Anointed One, the One on whom the Holy Spirit remained, and the One who would baptize His disciples with the Holy Spirit such that they would be anointed for their ministry during the coming age of local churches.

Over our next couple of messages from John, I would like to try to summarize what else John tells us about the Holy Spirit using the three titles we find in this Gospel for the Third Person of the Trinity - Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, and the Comforter (Paraclete). And we will understand each title better if we contrast God's Spirit with other evil spirits we face in our gospel ministry today: the spirit of the age, the seducing spirits with their doctrines of demons, and the spirit of loneliness, abandonment, and betrayal.

I. The Spirit of God is the Holy Spirit in contrast to the spirit of our age (John 20:22-23).

Illustration: The term *zeitgeist* means *spirit of the age*. I did a quick googling of the term and found it in the title of a couple of recent news stories that illustrate its meaning well: “How the Barbie movie marketing machine tapped into a cultural zeitgeist”; and “Few ‘Golf Brands’ Understand the Menswear Zeitgeist Quite Like Gumtree Golf & Nature Club.” Clearly, these news articles assume that there is a spirit of the age that makes some movies more popular than others, and some clothing more desirable than others.

Application: The term *zeitgeist* can be traced back to the German author Goethe, but the idea is much older than him. The Apostle Paul understood the idea, and he cautioned the Galatian churches against its influence: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for *our sins* to deliver us from *the present evil age*, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen” (Gal. 1:3-5; emphasis mine). Unknown to the news headlines of today, the present evil age, the *zeitgeist*, is connected to our sins.

Paul is clear about this. We often think of salvation as deliverance from the evil of a future in hell, and it is certainly that. But it is more. It is deliverance by the grace of God in Jesus Christ from this present evil age, from the world’s *zeitgeist*, which is a product of our sinfulness.

Our passage in John tells us the Holy Spirit’s role in this salvation. The apostles, as Jesus’s chosen ministers of the gospel, were to proclaim forgiveness of sins in Christ. Those who obeyed their gospel message in repentance and faith would be forgiven; those who rejected their gospel message in refusal and unbelief would not be forgiven. When the

Holy Spirit works, He works against sin. His is a gospel work that determines whether or not we are forgiven. Working against sin, He is not just any spirit, but the *Holy Spirit*.

A. W. Tozer had this to say about the holiness of the Holy Spirit and His fight against sin in our lives: "Let us imagine that we are talking to an inquirer, some eager young Christian, let us say, who has sought us out to learn about the Spirit-filled life. As gently as possible, considering the pointed nature of the questions, we would probe his soul somewhat as follows: 'Are you sure you want to be filled with a Spirit who, though He is like Jesus in His gentleness and love, will nevertheless demand to be Lord of your life? Are you willing to let your personality to be taken over by another, even if that other be the Spirit of God Himself? If the Spirit takes charge of your life He will expect unquestioning obedience in everything. He will not tolerate in you the self-sins even though they are permitted and excused by most Christians. By the self-sins I mean self-love, self-pity, self-seeking, self-confidence, self-righteousness, self-aggrandizement, self-defense. You will find the Spirit to be in sharp opposition to the easy ways of the world and of the mixed multitude within the precincts of religion. He will be jealous over you for good. He will take the direction of your life away from you. He will reserve the right to test you, to discipline you, to chasten you for your soul's sake. He may strip you of those borderline pleasures which other Christians enjoy but which are to you a source of refined evil. Through it all He will enfold you in a love so vast, so mighty, so wondrous that your very losses will seem like gains and your small pains like pleasures. Yet the flesh will whimper under His yoke and cry out against it as a burden too great to bear. And you will be permitted to enjoy the solemn privilege of suffering to 'fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ' in your flesh for His body's sake, which is the church (Colossians 1:24). Now, with the conditions before you, do you still want

to be filled with [the] Holy Spirit?" [*God's Pursuit of Man*, p. 466 in Moody Press's 3-in-1 volume].

Tozer's words remind us that the Holy Spirit is much more than a dove. John's Gospel is clear about that too. In 15:26, the Lord Jesus explains that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. This means that the Holy Spirit is in one sense one thing with the Father, but in another sense distinguishable from the Father as someone else. In other words, the Holy Spirit and the Father are one in nature, but two in person. The Holy Spirit is more than a dove because He is God.

Finally, the Holy Spirit is more than a dove because He is God's power to save from sin. Jesus introduces the Holy Spirit and His power to save to Nicodemus in John 3: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (vv. 5-8). Here the Holy Spirit is water that can give birth to new spiritual life and wind that blows where it desires to give this birth.

In John 4 Jesus told the Samaritan woman about this water, the power of the Holy Spirit to save her from sin: "Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water. The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water? Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle? Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again:

But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. The woman saith unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw" (vv. 13-15). Just then, Jesus asks her about her husband, and the saving, albeit painful, power of the Holy Spirit begins to work for her forgiveness.

And finally in Chapter 7, we read about the climactic last day of the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. On that last day, the priest took his golden pitcher to the famously sacred Pool of Siloam, gathering water there to be poured at the base of the altar, amidst the crowd's waving their leafy branches, chanting the last verses of Psalm 118, all in sync with the three loud blasts of priestly trumpets.

Suddenly, a voice rang out over the tumult arresting the attention of all. And it said: "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" And John adds: "Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (vv. 37-39). And that is exactly what happened. After Jesus was glorified, the Spirit came at Pentecost, and all who had believed in Him became witnesses to a thirsty world of the saving power of the Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of sins.

Conclusion: The spirit of the age encourages us to downplay the seriousness of our sins, to be indifferent about our need for forgiveness, and to feel comfortable that we are not so bad after all. The evil age is our present evil age because it was formed in part by our sin. It is the time and place from which we have come. Only the Holy Spirit can break the power of this present evil age, which is the power of our sin.

Last Thursday, we had a lot of wind along with a good amount of water. A tornado even touched down in Dublin. When my wife came home from work, she found my office door open and the floor all wet. The wind and water had blown open the door disturbing the comfortable confines of a place I call home, almost as a gentle warning that a tornado was on its way and that we needed to take cover.

The spirit of our age is the place our sinful hearts have called home, but it is the saving power of the Holy Spirit that, like water and wind, can blow open the door, warn us about the coming storm, and bring its saving eternal life into our hearts to forgive us for our sins. Has the Holy Spirit ever done so for you? If not, would you ask Him to do so today?

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*