

REV. DR. TALMAGE

The Eminent Brooklyn Divine's Sunday Sermon.

Subject: "Tongues of Fire."

Text: "Have ye received the Holy Ghost." Acts xix, 2.

The word ghost, which means a soul, or spirit, has been degraded in common parlance. We talk of ghosts as baneful and frightful and in a frivolous or superstitious way. But my text speaks of a Ghost who is omnipotent and divine and everywhere present and ninety-one times in the New Testament called the Holy Ghost. The only time I ever heard this text preached from was in the opening days of my ministry, when a glorious old Scotch minister came up to help me in my village church. On the day of my ordination and installation he said, "If you get into the corner of a Saturday night without enough sermons for Sunday, send for me, and I will come and preach for you." The fact ought to be known that the first three years of a pastor's life are appallingly arduous. No other profession makes the twentieth part of the demand on a young man. If a secular preacher prepares one or two speeches for a political campaign it is considered arduous. If a lecturer prepares one lecture for a year, he is thought to have done well. But a young pastor has two sermons to deliver every Sabbath before the same audience, besides all his other work, and the most of ministers never recover from the awful nervous strain of the first three years. Be sympathetic with all young ministers and withhold your criticisms.

My aged Scotch friend responded to my first call and came and preached from the text that I now announce. I remember nothing but the text. It was the last sermon he ever preached. On the following Saturday he was called to his heavenly reward. But I remember just how he appeared, as, leaning over the pulpit, he looked into the face of the audience, and with earnestness and pathos and electric force asked them, in the words of my text, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost?" The office of this present discourse is to open a door, to unveil a Personage, to introduce a force not sufficiently recognized. He is as great as God. He is God. The second verse of the first chapter of the Bible introduces Him—Genesis 1, 2. "The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters"—that is, as an albatross or eagle spreads her wings over her young and warms them into life and teaches them to fly, so the Eternal Spirit spread His great, broad, radiant wings over this earth in its callow and unfiled state and warmed it into life and fluttered over it and set it winging its way through immensity. It is the tip top of all beautiful and sublime suggestiveness. Can you not almost see the outspread wings over the nest of young worlds? "The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters."

Another appearance of the Holy Ghost was at Jerusalem during a great feast. Strangers speaking seventeen different languages were present from many parts of the world. But in one house they heard what seemed like the coming of a cyclone or hurricane. It made the trees bend and the houses quake. The cry was, "What is that?" And then a forked flame of fire tipped each forehead, and what with the blast of wind and the dropping fire a panic took place, until Peter explained that it was neither cyclone nor conflagration, but the brilliance and anointing and baptismal power of the Holy Ghost.

That scene was partially repeated in a forest when Rev. John Easton was preaching. There was the sound of a rushing, mighty wind, and the people looked to the sky to see if there were any signs of a storm, but it was a clear sky, yet the sound of the wind was so great that horses, frightened, broke loose from their fastenings, and the whole assembly felt that the sound was supernatural and pentecostal. Oh, what an infinite and almighty and glorious personage is the Holy Ghost! He brooded this planet into life, and now that through sin it has become a dead world He will brood it the second time into life. Perilous attempt would be a comparison between the three persons of the Godhead. They are equal, but there is some consideration which attaches itself to the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Ghost, that does not attach itself to either God the Father or God the Son. We may grieve God the Father and grieve God the Son and be forgiven, but we are directly told that there is a sin against the Holy Ghost, which shall never be forgiven either in this world or in the world to come. And it is wonderful that while on the street you hear the name of God and Jesus Christ used in profanity you never hear the words Holy Ghost. This hour I speak of the Holy Ghost as Biblical interpreter, as a human constructor, as a solace for the broken hearted, as a preacher's re-enforcement.

The Bible is a mass of contradictions, an affirmation of impossibilities, unless the Holy Ghost helps us to understand it. The Bible says of itself that the Scripture is not for "private interpretation," but "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost"—that is, not private interpretation, but Holy Ghost interpretation. Pile on your study table all the commentaries of the Bible—Matthew Henry and Scott and Adam Clarke and Albert Barnes and Bush and Alexander, and all the arch-bibles, and all the Bible dictionaries, and all the maps of Palestine, and all the international series of Sunday-school lessons. And if that is all you will not understand the deeper and grander meanings of the Bible so well as that Christian mountaineer who, Sunday morning, after having shaken down the fodder for the cattle, comes into his cabin, takes up his worn Bible, and with a prayer that sets the

heavens asks for the Holy Ghost to unfold the book.

No more unreasonable would I be if I should take up The Novoe Vremya of St. Petersburg, all printed in Russian, and say, "There is no sense in this newspaper, for I cannot understand one line of all its columns," than for any man to take up the Bible, and without getting Holy Ghost illumination as to its meaning say: "This Book insults my common sense. I cannot understand it. Away with the incongruity!" No one but the Holy Ghost, who inspired the Scriptures, can explain the Scriptures. Fully realize that, and you will be as enthusiastic a lover of the old book as my venerable friend who told me in Philadelphia last week that he was reading the Bible through the fifty-ninth time, and it became more attractive and thrilling every time he went through it. In the saddlebags that hung across my horse's back as I rode from Jerusalem down to the Dead Sea and up to Damascus I had all the books about Palestine that I could carry, but many a man on his knees, in the privacy of his room, has had flashed upon him more vivid appreciation of the word of God than many a man who has visited all the scenes of Christ's birth, and Paul's eloquence, and Peter's imprisonment, and Joshua's prowess, and Elijah's ascension. I do not depreciate any of the helps for Bible study, but I do say that they all together come infinitely short without a direct communication from the throne of God in response to prayerful solicitation. We may find many interesting things about the Bible without special illumination, as how many horses Solomon had in his stables, or how long was Noah's ark, or who was the only woman whose full name is given in the Scriptures, or which is the middle verse of the Bible, and all that will do you no more good than to be able to tell how many beanpoles there are in your neighbor's garden.

The learned Earl of Chatham heard the famous Mr. Cecil preach about the Holy Ghost and said to a friend on the way home from church: "I could not understand it, and do you suppose anybody understood it?" "Oh, yes," said his Christian friend, "there were uneducated women and some little children present who understood it." I warrant you that the English soldier had under supernatural influence read the book, for after the battle of Inkermann was over he was found dead with his hand glued to the page of the open Bible by his own blood, and the words adhered to his hands as they buried him, "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in Me, though dead, yet shall he live."

Next consider the Holy Ghost as a human reconstructor. We must be made over again. Christ and Nicodemus talked about it. Theologians call it regeneration. I do not care what you call it, but we have to be reconstructed by the Holy Ghost. We become new creatures, hating what we once loved and loving what we once hated. If sin were a luxury, it must become a detestation. If we preferred bad associations, we must prefer good associations. In most cases it is such a complete change that the world notices the difference and begins to ask: "What has come over that man? Whom has he been with? What has so affected him? What has ransacked his entire nature? What has turned him square about?" Take two pictures of Paul—one on the road to Damascus to kill the disciples of Christ, the other on the road to Ostia to die for Christ. Come nearer home and look at the man who found his chief delight in a low class of club-rooms, hiccoughing around a card table and then stumbling down the front steps after midnight and staggering homeward, and that same man, one week afterward, with his family on the way to a prayer meeting. What has done it? It must be something tremendous. It must be God. It must be the Holy Ghost.

Notice the Holy Ghost as the solver of broken hearts. Christ calls Him the Comforter. Nothing does the world so much want as comfort. The most people have been abused, misrepresented, cheated, lied about, swindled, bereft. What is needed is balsam for the wounds, lantern for dark roads, rosary from maligning pursuers, a lift from the marble slab of tombstones. Life to most has been a semifaith. They have not got what they wanted. They have not reached that which they started for. Friends betray. Change of business stand loses old custom and does not bring enough custom to make up for the loss. Health becomes precarious when one most needs strong muscle and steady nerve and clear brain. Out of this audience of thousands and thousands, if I should ask all those who have been unhurt in the struggle of life to stand up, or all standing to hold up their right hands, not one would move. Oh, how much we need the Holy Ghost as comforter! He recites the sweetest gospel promises to the hardy bestead. He assures of mercy mingled with the severities. He consoles with thoughts of coming release. He tells of a heaven where tear is never wept and burden is never carried and injustice is never suffered. Comfort for all the young people who are maltreated at home, or receive insufficient income, or are robbed of their schooling, or kept back from positions they earned by the putting forward of others less worthy. Comfort for all these men and women midway in the path of life, worn out with what they have already gone through, and with no brightening future. Comfort for these aged ones amid many infirmities and who feel themselves to be in the way in the home or business which themselves established with their own grit.

The Holy Ghost comfort, I think, generally comes in the shape of a soliloquy. You find yourself saying to yourself: "Well, I ought not to grieve this way about my mother's death. She had suffered enough. She had borne other people's burdens long enough. I am glad that father and mother are together in heaven, and they will be waiting to greet us, and I will be only a little while away now, and God makes no mistake."

Or you soliloquize, saying: "It is hard to lose my property. I am sure I worked hard enough for it. But God will take care of us, and, as to the children, the money might have spoiled them, and we find that those who have to struggle for themselves generally turn out best, and it will all be well if this upsetting of our worldly resources leads us to lay up treasures in heaven." Or you soliloquize, saying: "It was hard to give up that boy when the Lord took him. I expected great things of him, and, oh, how we miss him out of the house, and there are so many things I come across that make one think of him, and he was such a splendid fellow! But then what an escape he has made from the temptations and sorrows which come to all who grow up, and it is a grand thing to have him safe from all possible harm, and there are all those Bible promises for parents who have lost children, and we shall feel a drawing heavenward that we could not have otherwise experienced." And after you have said that you get that relief which comes from an outburst of tears. I do not say to you, as some say, do not cry. God pity people in trouble who have the parched eyeball and the dry eyelid and cannot shed a tear. That makes maniacs. To God's people tears are the dew of the night dashed with sunrise. I am so glad you can weep. But you think these things you say to yourself are only soliloquies. No, no; they are the Comforter, who is the Holy Ghost.

Notice also the Holy Ghost as the preacher's reinforcement. You and I have known preachers encyclopedic in knowledge, brilliant as an iceberg when the sun smites it, and with Chastefieldian address and rhetorical hand uplifted with diamond big enough to dazzle an assembly and so surcharged with vocabulary that when they left this life it might be said of each of them as De Quincy said of another that in the act of dying he committed a robbery, absconding with a valuable polyglot dictionary, yet no awakening or converting or sanctifying result, while some plain man, with humblest phraseology, has seen audiences whelmed with religious influence. It was the Holy Ghost. What a useful thing it would be if every minister would give the history of his sermons! Years ago at an outdoor meeting in the State of New York I preached to many thousands. There had been much prayer on the grounds for a great outpouring of the Holy Ghost at that service, and the awakening power exceeded anything I ever witnessed since I began to preach, with perhaps the exception of two or three occasions. Clergymen and Christian workers by the score and hundreds expressed themselves as having been blessed during the service. That afternoon I took the train for an outdoor meeting in the State of Ohio, where I was to preach on the night of the next day. As the sermon had proved so useful the day before and the theme was fresh in my mind, I resolved to reproduce it, and did reproduce it as far as I could, but the result was nothing at all. Never had I seemed to have anything to do with a flatter failure. What was the difference between the two services? Some will say, "You were tired with a long journey." No, I was not tired at all. Some will say, "The temporal circumstances in the first case were more favorable than in the last." No, they were more favorable in the last. The difference was in the power of the Holy Ghost—mightily present at the first service, not seemingly present at all at the second. I call upon the ministers of America to give the history of sermons, for I believe it will illustrate as nothing else can the truth of that Scripture, "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord."

On the Sabbath of the dedication of one of our churches in Brooklyn, at the morning service, 328 souls stood up to profess Christ. They were the converts in the Brooklyn Academy of Music, where we had been worshipping. The reception of so many members—and many of them baptized by immersion—had made it an arduous service, which continued from half past ten in the morning until half past two in the afternoon. From that service we went home exhausted, because there is nothing so exhausting as deep emotion. A messenger was sent out to obtain a preacher for that night, but the search was unsuccessful, as all the ministers were engaged for some other place. With no preparation at all for the evening service, except the looking in Cruden's Concordance for a text and feeling almost too weary to stand up, I began the service, saying audibly while the opening song was being sung, although because of the singing no one but God heard it: "Oh, Lord, Thou knowest my insufficiency for this service! Come down in gracious power upon this people." The place was shaken with the divine presence. As far as we could find out, over 400 persons were converted that night. Hear it, all young men entering the ministry; hear it, all Christian workers. It was the Holy Ghost.

In the Second Reformed Church, of Somerville, N. J., in my boyhood days, Mr. Osborne, the evangelist, came to hold a special service. I see him now as he stood in the pulpit. Before he announced his text and before he had uttered a word of his sermon strong men wept aloud, and it was like the day of judgment. It was the Holy Ghost.

In 1857 the electric telegraph bore strange messages. One of them read, "My dear parents will rejoice to hear that I have found peace with God." Another read, "Dear mother, the work continues, and I, too, have been converted." Another read, "At last faith and peace." In Vermont a religious meeting was singing the hymn, "Waiting and Watching for Me." The song rolled out on the night air, and a man halted and said, "I wonder if there will be any one waiting and watching for me?" It started him heavenward. What was it? The Holy Ghost. In that 1857 Jaynes's Hall, Philadelphia, and Fulton street prayer meeting, New York, telegraphed each other the number of souls saved and the rising of the devotional tides. Sunday prayer meetings were held in

all the cities. Ships came into harbor, captain and all the sailors saved on that voyage. Police and fire departments met in their rooms for divine worship. At Albany the Legislature of the State of New York assembled in the rooms of the Court of Appeals for religious services. Congressional union prayer meeting was opened at Washington. From whence came the power? From the Holy Ghost. That power shook New York. That power shook America. That power shook the Atlantic Ocean. That power shook the earth. That power could take this entire audience into the peace of the gospel quicker than you could lift your eyes heavenward. Come, Holy Ghost! Come, Holy Ghost! He has come! He is here! I feel Him in my heart. There are thousands who feel Him in their hearts, convicting some, saving some, sanctifying some.

The difference in evangelical usefulness is not so much a difference in brain, in scholarship or elocutionary gifts as in Holy Ghost power. You will not have much surprise at the extraordinary career of Charles G. Finney as a soul winner, if you know that soon after his conversion he had this experience of the Paraclete. He says:

"As I turned and was about to take a seat by the fire I received a baptism of the Holy Ghost. Without any expectation of it, without ever having the thought in my mind that there was any such thing for me, without any recollection that I had ever heard the thing mentioned by any person in the world, the Holy Ghost descended upon me in a manner that seemed to go through me, body and soul. Indeed, it seemed to come in waves and waves of liquid love, for I could not express it in any other way. It seemed like the very breath of God. I can recollect distinctly that it seemed to fan me like immense wings. No words can express the wonderful love that was shed abroad in my heart. I wept aloud with joy and love. These waves came over me and over me and over me, one after the other until, I recall I cried out, 'I shall die if these waves continue to pass over me.' I said, 'Lord, I cannot bear any more.'"

Now, my hearers, let 500 of us, whether clerical or lay workers, get such a divine visitation as that, and we could take this world for God before the clock of the next century strikes 1.

How many marked instances of Holy Ghost power? When a black trumpeter took His place in Whitefield's audience proposing to blow the trumpet at a certain point in the service and put everything into derision, somehow he could not get the trumpet to his lips, and at the close of the meeting he sought out the preacher and asked for his prayers. It was the Holy Ghost. What was the matter with Hedley Vicens, the memorable soldier, when he sat with his Bible before him in a tent, and his deriding comrades came in and jeered, saying, "Turned Methodist, eh?" And another said: "You hypocrite! Bad as you were I never thought you would come to this, old fellow." And then he became the soldier evangelist, and when a soldier in another regiment hundreds of miles away telegraphed his spiritual anxieties to Hedley Vicens, saying, "What shall I do?" Vicens telegraphed as thrilling a message as ever went over the wires, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."

What power was being felt? It was the Holy Ghost. And what more appropriate? For the Holy Ghost is a "tongue of fire," and the electricity that flies along the wires is a tongue of fire. And that reminds me of what I might do now. From the place where I stand on this platform there are invisible wires of lines or influences stretching to every heart in all the seats on the main floor and up into the boxes and galleries, and there are other innumerable wires or lines of influence reaching out from this place into the vast beyond and across continents and under the seas, for in my recent journey around the world I did not find a country where I had not been preaching this gospel for many years through the printing press. So a telegraph operator sits or stands at a given point and sends messages in all directions, and you only hear the click, click, click of the electric apparatus, but the telegrams go on their errand. God help me now to touch the right key and send the right message along the right wires to the right places. Who shall we first call up? To whom shall I send the message? I guess I will send the first to all the tired, wherever they are, for there are so many tired souls. Here goes the Christy message, "Come unto Me, all ye who are weary, and I will give you rest."

Misplaced Gratitude.

I was told, the other day, an amusing child story, the utter simplicity of which redeems it from irrelevance. A certain worthy woman had a family of small children, to whom she frequently made edifying remarks. One day she sent her little boy for the milk; he was away some time, then returned empty handed, with an apprehensive expression in his eye. Siding up to his mother, he remarked:

"Ma, one ought to thank God for everything, oughtn't one? I think I've heard you say so."

"Yes, that's quite right," replied the unsuspecting parent; whereupon the child's face broadened with a relieved smile.

"Well then, thank God I've broken the jug," said he.

His position was unmistakably logical, and it took his good mother some time to explain to him that "circumstances altered cases," and that if he broke jugs again he would be punished.