

In the Spirit (II)

"I John, your brother and partaker with you in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Jesus, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a great voice" (Rev. 1:9-10).

"But ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwells in you" (Rom. 8:9).

I was in the Spirit. Ye are in the Spirit if so be that the Spirit of God dwells in you.

Although in John's case the effect of being in the Spirit was particular, specific, the word from Romans indicates that the normal life of a true child of God is a life in the Spirit. We are placed there by our new birth, when born of the Spirit, when we receive the Holy Spirit. The education of the children of God lies in that very realm, and is a matter of learning from day to day, in all situations, how to abide in the Spirit, to keep in the Spirit.

Now we know what this means by the natural. Perhaps we say, and we have heard people say: Well, I was not in the spirit of that, or, I was not in the spirit for that. They may use another word; they may use the word 'mood' — that is what they mean. They were not 'in tune' with the situation; they were of another and a different spirit; they were not 'at home' in the situation or in the atmosphere, or prepared for what was on hand; they were out of it, or, we were out of it.

But here it is not an 'it'. That same principle applies to our Christian life, and everything for us hangs upon whether we are, in the true sense, 'in the Spirit', or not 'in the Spirit'. That is, of course, in the Holy Spirit. Now John said, "I was in the Spirit, and I heard ...". He heard because he was 'in the Spirit'.

There are two or three simple but very important things that this word teaches us. And, quite clearly, in the case of John, being 'in the Spirit' represented a translation from himself and from his earthly situation. It is not a contradiction, but it is a transcendent when John said, in one sentence "I was in the isle that is called Patmos", and in the next sentence, "I was in the Spirit". All that being 'in Patmos' meant, of course, constituted a very difficult situation for him or for any man in like circumstances: isolation, exile, separation, loneliness and certain other privations; a situation that could have been most depressing, disconcerting or even devastating. That was the natural situation. John said, I was in the Spirit. While in Patmos, I was in the Spirit. And being 'in the Spirit', as we see, meant being above his circumstances; being translated out of the earthly conditions as the final and ultimate argument in life. There was something other, something more, something different in which he could live. 'In the Spirit' he was not a prisoner in Patmos: he was free! 'In the Spirit' he was not crushed and overwhelmed by his natural circumstances: he was lifted up. Being 'in the Spirit' gives us another realm, another set of circumstances. It is a great lifting up and lifting out thing to be 'in the Spirit'.

I started by saying that this is the realm and the nature of the Christian's education: how to live and how to abide in the Spirit day by day, in the city and all that that means, in the home and what that means, where we are, whatever our 'Patmos' might be. It might be anything that is not pleasant to the flesh — *"ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit if so be that the Spirit of Christ dwells in you."* You have another realm, and you have another power, and another life, and another environment. And every one of us knows very well that this is true that we have to learn how to live in our 'native air', as born-from-above children of God.

Evidently it was true with John that, while being in Patmos, he was not in Patmos. He

could set over against all that, 'I was in the Spirit'.

But again, what did that mean in his case, and what does it mean in our case, to be 'in the Spirit'? What we have just said may be regarded as the negative side. We are *not* in the flesh; we are *not* in the world; we are *not* necessarily in the control of our circumstances or the domination of our surroundings. We are *not* if we are 'in the Spirit'. But there is a positive side, and we will always do well to keep on the positive side of things! With John, being 'in the Spirit' meant occupation with the Lord Jesus. You see how true that was in his case there — being occupied with Christ. This is a matter for our exercise, because it is an attitude of heart and mind. We have so much in the New Testament of this kind: 'looking off unto Jesus'. Being 'in the Spirit' will always mean this, for this is the Spirit's occupation. The occupation of the Holy Spirit as we know, is with the Lord Jesus, from first to last, all the way through. His occupation is with the Lord Jesus; He has come as committed to the interests of the Lord Jesus, to keep them always in view and to work concerning them. We can say that the Holy Spirit's one and all-inclusive occupation is with the Lord Jesus. And if we are in the Spirit that will be our occupation. It will be true, as in the case of Paul, 'for us to live is Christ', but it must be an attitude of heart and of mind; we must be set on the Lord Jesus.

I have no doubt whatever that on this particular 'Lord's day' John was not found occupied with the Lord Jesus for the *first* time; we know otherwise. It was not such a great transition from his normal occupation with the Lord Jesus to this specific encounter with the Lord Jesus. The Lord comes specifically to those whose hearts are always set upon Him. It is not a far cry from a continuous outreach of heart to Him, to some particular discovery of Him. John was always occupied with the Lord Jesus, but on this occasion there was something special about that. The latter would not have been, I think, but for the former. My point is that we must, from day to day, cultivate this attitude of heart and mind to be occupied with the Lord Jesus, and in that we shall find the Spirit with us, the Spirit on our side to help us. We do know very well, and we are very slow to learn that we do not get very much help from the Holy Spirit, or His companionship as the One alongside when we are occupied with what is not the Lord Jesus, I mean, with what is contrary to Him. Then we get into the mire, and He leaves us there until we 'turn our eyes upon Jesus and look full into His wonderful face'.

Now, the point is again, that if Christ can be seen anywhere, in anyone, He will only be seen as we are 'in the Spirit'. If we are out of the Spirit we shall see anything but Christ, around us and in people. We can come into a gathering and there may be much of the Lord both as present in the very atmosphere, and in the Word, and in other ways, and we just miss everything because we are not 'in the Spirit'. We will be seeing people, and how things are done, and what is done, and everything like that; probably all the faults, all the weaknesses. We are not in the Spirit, and we are seeing anything but Christ even though He is there to be seen. If you and I are 'in the Spirit', if Christ can be seen in anyone, we shall see Him; if we are not 'in the Spirit' we shall see everything but Christ in one another. If He is to be seen, wherever that is, in persons, in gatherings, in things, it requires our being in the Spirit to see the Lord, and to hear Him. What are we looking for? Are we looking for those things that will confirm us in our judgments, conclusions, opinions? If we are looking for the Lord Jesus and we shall only be looking for the Lord Jesus if we are 'in the Spirit'. If He is to be seen, we shall see Him if we are in the Spirit.

"*I was in the Spirit and I heard ...*". It is always like that. What there was to hear, what there was to see, was the natural result of being 'in the Spirit'.

One other word. John, with his long Christian life of experience, service, and knowledge would never have been able to understand, to receive, or to understand all that is in this book that he wrote if he had not been 'in the Spirit'. But put that the other way; look at what is here! You know all the schools, all the teaching, all the teachers, all the interpreters. I suppose there is no book that has produced more books than this book,

trying to explain it; and we seem still to be far from a perfect understanding of it. I have no doubt that John understood it all, every bit of it; he knew all that it meant. And there are some mysteries in this book. How was it that he could receive, could understand, could know? Because he was 'in the Spirit'. Again it is this, the Holy Spirit is capacity for understanding things that no natural man can understand. It is our comfort. The Holy Spirit is our capacity for understanding; the Holy Spirit knows it all; and the Holy Spirit in us can make us know and understand profundities and ranges that no natural mind can grasp. That is, of course, stated definitely by the apostle to the Corinthians: "*The Spirit Himself searches all things yea, the deep things of God*"; "*The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit ... the Spirit Himself has revealed them.*" Here is a capacity, an ability which transcends all our natural ability in this matter. Do you sometimes feel your limitations in understanding divine things, and despair? This is not for such as have great natural capacity for grasping and understanding; the Spirit is for the child of God, whoever that child may be, learned or unlearned. It is just this, "*if so be that the Spirit of Christ dwells in us*". There is a capacity by the indwelling Spirit for what the greatest minds and brains without the Holy Spirit can never grasp.

Now John says: "I was in the Spirit ... and I heard". What did he hear? Well, the things that have defeated and defied all natural attempts to interpret and explain. He heard and he saw. You and I, if we have the Spirit, have a capacity for a life with the Lord in knowledge and understanding that lifts us on to a level that is above the best equipment apart from the Holy Spirit.

Now in all this, so hurriedly and imperfectly given, there is a challenge. Probably you have sensed the challenge. The Lord Jesus may be present in people: He may be present in gatherings; He may be present with intent to make Himself known, to reveal Himself, to come into touch with us, with all that that means, and we may miss it all because we are not in the Spirit!

Now the quite evident challenge is this: we must get adjusted with the Spirit. As we face each day we must ask the Lord that we may enter the day, and remain through the day, in the Spirit, for we never know when it is going to be 'the Lord's Day', a Lord's Day in this sense, when the Lord Jesus has something to say of vital consequence. When we come, or face coming to the Lord's people in gatherings, do we not need to get adjusted, that we come 'in the Spirit'? Then we shall not just come to a place and meet people, but, if He is there, we meet Him at once, and He meets us at once, and there is contact at once with the Lord. But we can come and go and miss everything if we are not 'in the Spirit'. Oh, I do feel that so much hangs upon this, whether we are in life adjusted to the Holy Spirit. A knowledge of the Lord Jesus depends upon that.