

There was nothing in the spiritual life of Jesus that did not come from the work of the Holy Spirit. Like wise there was no work of the Spirit in Jesus that did not find its reflection or anchor in the Old Testament scriptures. If the Spirit himself working in Jesus provided the fundamental foundation of his spiritual life, the scriptures were a major tool of the Spirit for doing what he wanted to do in Jesus. This should not surprise us since the scriptures are consistently portrayed as having the Spirit as their author, and constitute a revelation of God and his purposes. They “spoke of him”, Jesus, prophetically and comprehensively. Under the influence of the Spirit the scriptures were bound to impact him, therefore, and so it was inevitable that Jesus would become a man of the “Word”. Searching and understanding the scriptures would become another fundamental part of his spiritual foundations.

It is no different for us. If we do not allow the Spirit to make us committed students of the scriptures then we will neither understand nor grow into that degree of spiritual maturity in the purposes of God that the Father intends for us.

“Sitting among the teachers, listening and asking questions” Lk 2:46

In his providence the Father made sure that from his birth Jesus not merely had access to the scriptures but was surrounded by a culture in which the study of them was central and in which they were deeply revered even if not always fully appreciated. So from earliest boyhood he was taught them, with much of his schooling at Nazareth centred on the synagogue. This was the start God gave to his Son. There can hardly be a greater affirmation of the value of the scriptures for human living than this. By the age of twelve he was astonishing the religious teachers of the law in Jerusalem by the depth of his knowledge and the perception of his questions. He clearly had a very able and penetrating mind and gave a great deal of attention to the study of the Old Testament books, even if it was the Spirit of “wisdom” and the “the knowledge of the Lord” that gave him his spiritual perception. He went on throughout the “hidden years” reading, learning and growing in the knowledge of the scriptures, and it is worth noting that Jesus seems to have combined his studies of scripture in his young adulthood with a very busy working and family life. These years remind us that an early and deep education in scripture remains a priceless privilege and an essential foundation for spiritual growth. They were years in which the Spirit was his teacher and the scriptures his text book.

“Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory” Lk. 24:26

It is abundantly obvious, therefore, that by the time he reached the age of thirty and presented himself at the Jordan ready for baptism Jesus had gained a massive biblical understanding. The gospels reveal his very wide use of the Old Testament as well as a very profound use. The essential foundation for his ministry was laid. There can be no doubt that, at the Jordan, he understood not only the nature of the ministry that he was about to embark on, but also what the culmination of that work would be in terms of a sacrificial death on the cross followed by a resurrection. The notion that Jesus entered his ministry without such an understanding is quite absurd. John the Baptist’s cry of “*Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*” (Jn 1:29) would certainly not have taken him by surprise but merely have confirmed to him what he already knew from his reading of the scripture, namely that he was ordained to be *the* sacrificial lamb. Without such an awareness in his heart the baptism would have been a pointless exercise, rather than a powerful dedication of himself to sacrificial death.

The important thing to grasp is that it was through his studies of the scripture that he came to such a definitive and clear perception of what lay in front of him. In his human growth and spiritual development it was the scripture that mapped out for him his destiny. The gospels give us clear indications of how the Old Testament pointed to where his ministry would finally end, as, for example, his remark early in John’s gospel; “*Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert so the Son of Man must be lifted up so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life*” (Jn 3:14). He knew he had “*a cup to drink*”, a “*baptism to be baptised with*”; he knew that he was indeed to become the true Paschal Lamb, that Passover pointed to Him; he knew that he was the “*guilt offering*” of Isaiah 53, the servant who was to suffer, though he was without fault; he knew he was to have a Jonah experience of three days in the belly of Hades .

All this, and much more, he later made clear to his disciples after his resurrection. The truths about his sacrifice that he had lived with, that he had openly given voice to, that he had wrestled with and allowed to guide his path to the cross he made intensely illuminating to his disciples. As it had been for him so now it was for them that the scriptures should give the essential enlightenment that they so desperately needed in their moment of despair.

It would be quite impossible to conceive of Jesus going through with his destiny without the Spirit taking the prophetic scripture and illuminating and undergirding him in that destiny. Clarity and understanding of calling were the priceless contribution they made to the work he came to to accomplish.

For us they do exactly the same. Our own lives are not so precisely delineated, of course, as the One of whom the scriptures primarily spoke, but those same scriptures record our destiny as well as his, they record our own sonship by adoption, and they speak to us of the good works that are set before us. They give shape and expression to the inner longings of the heart and that sense of hope that the Spirit prompts within us. They speak of heaven and constantly re-assure, as no doubt they constantly did to the Son of man.

“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Lk 4:21)

The nature and direction of his ministry before the sacrificial climax at Calvary was equally well laid out for Jesus in the scriptures and must have been very much with him as he stood at Jordan. He knew that it was not only a moment of dedication but a moment also in which he would receive the anointing of the Spirit. The coming of the dove was no surprise for him, for he was praying for the Spirit at that very moment (Lk 3:21). He knew, as was evident later from his preaching in Nazareth (Lk 4:16ff.), that the anointing was to be a fulfilment of Isaiah 61:1ff and would be his empowerment for preaching and healing. As he preached in the synagogue at Nazareth he had no difficulty in finding the text in Isaiah and no difficulty in

**This is what is written:
the Christ will suffer and
rise from the dead on
the third day**

expounding it. Neither was he unaware of another passage in Isaiah, Isaiah 9:1ff, and its prophetic word about a great light in Galilee. He knew he was that light, and he was clearly led by that scripture to choose Galilee for his ministry. Certainly the Spirit would also have given him a sovereign impulse to focus on Galilee, but it was all so much more clear in his mind and heart when it was so remarkably undergirded by the word of his Father.

So it should be with us; the Spirit prompts but then the scriptures come again and again as a strong undergirding. With the scriptures enlightened by the Spirit it is possible to walk through life with open eyes rather than simply on impulse, even though the impulse may be God given. Whatever the Father requires of us becomes much more clearly outlined by a knowledge of and meditation in the scriptures. It is, of course, this remarkable relevance of scripture for the pattern of our lives that stamps those writings as being of more than human origin.

“I know where I came from and where I am going” Jn 8:14

As his ministry developed the question arose in people’s hearts, “*What manner of man is this?*”. Jesus already knew the answer. John’s gospel reveals that Jesus had a profound self awareness of the fact that he was much more than an ordinary human person. There was a compelling and magnificent authority about him, as of one who knew he had origins that were unique. The statements that came from his lips were unequivocal, such statements as, “*Glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began*” (Jn 17:5), “*You are from below; I am from above*” Jn 8:23, “*I and the Father are one*” (Jn 10:30), “*Before Abraham was, I am*” (Jn 8:58), “*I am the resurrection and the life*” Jn 11:25). These statements show him to have been aware of a previous and eternal existence. If Mary did speak to him of the nature of his birth, that alone would not have brought about the serenity or the depth of this self awareness. It is the revelation of this pre-existence by the Holy Spirit that accounts for its depth, but at the same time those scriptures which the Spirit compelled him to study also spelt out this truth to him with great prophetic power. He knew, for example, that he was the one of whom Isaiah spoke as being “*Wonderful Counsellor*” and “*Mighty God*” (Is. 9:6); he knew that in his kingship he a “*greater than Solomon*”; he knew that he was the heavenly *Son of Man* depicted in Daniel 7:13, and he told his accusers as much when he was on trial (Mk 14:62); he would have seen the pointer to divinity in Psalm 45:6 which said of the coming Son of David, “*Your throne, O God, will last for ever.*” It is not difficult to see him pouring over such scripture and finding immense enlightenment. Thus the collusion of inner revelation on the one hand and the illumination of the scripture on the other brought about a majestic certainty concerning his own divine being.

“The scriptures will convey to us our own divine adoption as children of God”

All this explains why Jesus put so much store on the scriptures in all he did and said. He knew that as far as he was concerned they bore the imprint of God; they could not be anything other than divine testimony. That is the value we should also place upon them. They will not only show us him but will convey to us our own standing with God, our own divine adoption as children of God, our own life yet to come. It is a poor spiritual life that does not have a deep sense of its standing and status with God through deep meditation in the scriptures.

“It is written, ‘You shall not test the Lord your God’” (Matt 4:7)

Certain books and passages of scripture become from time to time a clear mirror of the events of our lives. They are intended to be so. They encapsulate our anxieties, temptations and difficult situations; they provide necessary strength and guidance. This is precisely what happened to Jesus in his temptations. He responded to Satan consistently from Deuteronomy, for he saw the testings of the wilderness wanderings of scripture as a mirror of his own testings. He found that of immense value. It is very unlikely that he had the scroll of Deuteronomy with him! He had mastered the book, and it was part of him - the Spirit was bringing its message to his memory, something Jesus later said his disciples would experience (Jn 14:26).

“Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets” Matt 5:17

Jesus totally endorsed the great moral statements of the Old Testament revelation. That much is very clear from his own teaching. But his own grasp of them was very different from the teachers of his day. They worked at codifying every detail for every situation, producing huge burdens for behaviour, whereas he worked on the great principles underlying the Law and released people into the freedom of genuine moral behaviour. No greater example of this can be found than his day to day attitude to the Sabbath, which he interpreted in the greater perspective of genuine love for our neighbour. He exposed the greed, envy, ambition and violence which underlay the behaviour of those most concerned to cavil over the codified law, the Scribes and Pharisees. From the priests he demanded “*mercy, not sacrifice*” (). He showed forgiveness, not condemnation to an adulterous woman, he showed compassion not arrogance to a poor widow. He was not satisfied with outward behaviour but with the wellsprings of the heart, which should be clean of impure and violent thoughts.

Here was the essence of his great teaching programme - it was a programme deeply rooted in the Old Testament law. It was a programme that had the same perspective as that of the prophets when they vainly tried to call Israel back to the real meaning of the Mosaic legislation. There is in fact very little that Jesus taught that cannot be grounded in the Old Testament scripture. His basis was the basis of the ten commandments to which he had been accustomed from a boy. There is little doubt that he spent a great deal of time meditating over such a massive foundation for moral and godly living or that it gave him his essential starting point in his teaching. Like David he would have said “*your word is a lamp to my feet*”. He knew “*the fear of the Lord*”.

“He showed them in all the scriptures the things that belonged to himself” Lk 24:27

The best commentary on the value of scripture for Jesus can be seen in the way that Jesus taught his disciples to base their “gospel” on what he taught them “from all the scriptures the things about himself. The scriptures were foundational. He was a man of the word; they must follow. To have the scriptures to hand (in our case both Old and New Testaments) is a profound blessing, therefore, and not to have them is a profound loss. Not to use them when they are to hand, and when the Spirit is constantly prompting us in that direction, is an appalling failure. To seek to provide the scriptures for those who do not have them is a work of immense significance.

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