

GREAT PREACHERS 2

REV J RUSSELL HOWDEN

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The Keswick Convention began in Cumbria in 1875 and may have been inspired by the Evangelical Revival of 1857 when Moody and Sankey visited England. It was the revival that promoted evangelism in even staid churches and in chapels, mission halls, ragged schools and even universities. It was also inspired by the great evangelical movement that began around the late 1820s with the Brethren Movement which insisted that the adherence to Scripture was all that was required for any believer and that clericalism was not a New Testament teaching. However, the clerics of the Anglican church were some of the pioneers of the Keswick Convention such as Canon T D Harford Battersby of St John's, Keswick, Rev Evan Hopkins, Dr J Elder Cummings and another vicar of St John's, Keswick, Rev H Gresford Jones who later became the Bishop of Carlisle.

Joseph Russell Howden was said to be a son of the manse born to John and Mary around 1871/1872. John had a secular post as a clerk in a journalist's office. John and Mary also had a daughter, Gertrude, born in 1881.

As for Joseph, he married Emma Annie Summers on 3 June 1883. He was then a bank clerk and she was a few years older than her husband. They had a son, Eric, born 1895.

But to consider the Keswick Convention. In recent years, perhaps from the 1990s, the Convention has taken on modern ideas and the spiritual aspect of the Convention has been compromised or lost.

1910 was the year when J Russell Howden, BD, first attended the Convention and somewhat unwillingly. He was a young curate and had an unfortunate attitude towards Keswick. But, in 1910, the Lord spoke to him and, in 1912, he gave a brief address at a morning prayer meeting and was put on the list of speakers.

Between the two world wars he became known as the Keswick 'theologian' a title that had been given to Evan Hopkins for over forty years.

Mr Howden also undertook mission work. In 1925 he was in Shanghai and then San Francisco and in 1935 in South Africa.

It also appears that he kept a secular job as a clerk during many years of his ministry.

Mr Howden was a tall, commanding figure with a resonant voice and, in later life, had a neatly trimmed beard. He had two successful ministries at Christ Church, Southborough, Tunbridge Wells, 1917- 1938 and then at St Andrews, Holborn 1938-1956, a famous Wren church burned out by bombs during World War II.

He also took part in two of the war-time Keswick in London Conventions and remained a Council member of the main Keswick Convention.

During the war of 1939-1945, and afterwards, Mr Howden, although suffering from ill health and, later, a paralysis, curtailed his ministry but, during the interval between the wars, he was in the front rank of speakers. He delivered the Keswick Bible Readings five times and his set of addresses on the trinity of man's foes, namely the world, the flesh and the devil was a remarkable exposition of 1924.

He died on 25 July 1959 at the age of 87.

As several have said, "It is a pity that all Anglicans do not preach the Gospel and minister the Word as Mr Howden did, but then not all vicars and clergy love the Lord and the Bible, as he did".

This is an example of his ministry:

GOD'S GIFT TO BELIEVERS
REV. J. RUSSELL HOWDEN, B.D.

Be filled with the Spirit—EPHESIANS 5: 18.

God has been showing us life as He would have us live it. Now the question is, "How is it to be realised?"

Remember that all life begins as a gift. Natural life is a gift. You do not make yourself live; you live because you had to; you had no option in the matter. And in similar fashion, your Christian life, the new life that is in Christ, is a gift. You could not make yourself live, though when you were born again, in that supreme moment of your experience, all the emphasis was necessarily placed upon you and your definite acceptance of Jesus Christ. And yet when you looked back upon it you discovered that it was not so much what you did as what He did. Life is a gift to be received. John 1: 12 declares that to "as many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name." There is no other way of being born again. That is the mystery and the wonder of the new birth.

Then if you have been born again, remember that is only the beginning, not the ending. After birth comes growth, and growth is just as much a gift as birth. You cannot make yourself grow. "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature?" asked the Lord. You cannot make yourself grow naturally. You can hinder it by foolish habits, by self-indulgence, and by wrong doing. You can stunt and spoil the development of your life, or you can promote it by obedience to God's laws.

Growth itself depends upon factors you cannot command, and cannot even fully understand. And so it is in spiritual things. Growth also is a gift of God. And this growth into such a life as has been set before us so graciously and so winsomely, we can hinder; or, by God's grace, we can seek to obey the laws that govern it.

What are the laws? If you will turn to Ephesians 5: 18, you will see it all summed up in one sentence, "Be filled with the Spirit." Notice two or three things about that. First of all, observe that the verb is passive—"Be filled." It is nothing you have to do; it is rather something you have to let God do. God comes and He bids us let Him have His own way with us in growth and development, even as He had His way with us in the new birth. You were born again when you received Jesus Christ.

When you received Jesus Christ you received God; and when God received you, you received the Spirit of God. If you are Christ's, you have the Holy Spirit. But there is a difference between having the Holy Spirit and being filled with the Spirit. It is a difference, not of kind, but of degree; and the reason for our stunted development is that we have not been willing to let God come into our lives and do in us that which we could never do for ourselves. Some of us have been striving for such a blessing as this. We have been struggling and wrestling to attain it. We have been full of good resolutions and good desires, and we have striven and struggled to bring these resolves to the birth. But nine times out of ten we have failed, and all the time God has been saying to us, "Be still and know that I am God."

Then it is not only passive, but the verb is imperative—"Be filled with the Spirit." It is a command. It leaves you and me no option in the matter. It is just as much God's command as any other command. God does not propose that there should be two classes of believers—those who are Spirit-filled and those who are not Spirit-filled. The fact of the command being given shows only too clearly that there is a need for it. So many of us have but little of God in our lives, and so little of that practical setting forth of God's beauty in life and conduct, and so little real desire to be pleasing to Him. Therefore we are to be filled.

Also notice that the verse is in the present tense, and the present tense in the grammar of our New Testament always implies some thing which has a definite beginning, and leads on to a course of events and of experience and of happening. You are to be filled with the Spirit this morning. But the blessing of this morning will not

do for the needs of tomorrow. The blessing of today will not suffice for next week; and it is your privilege, dear child of God, to keep on being filled with the Spirit, God continually pouring of His fulness into your heart, and you continually receiving it, and continually, by His grace, transmuting that fulness into the expression of life and character and personality.

You say, "Well, how is this to be done? What am I to do to be filled with the Spirit?" God is saying to us all in the words of the Lord Jesus and through the lips of His servant, "Follow me."

Many I doubt not, by His grace, did it. We may have begun as late as last night, and we had never done before, to follow Him—and He filled us. Look in John 7: 39, there you read of the inescapable condition which is necessary to being filled with the Spirit—"For the Holy Spirit was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified." When you glorify the Lord Jesus then God gives you the Holy Ghost.

It is put in so many different ways—presenting your bodies a living sacrifice; following Jesus Christ; making Jesus Christ King. But they all mean the same thing. They all mean the yielding of your will to God. And please observe that this is the reason why God gives us such a command as this in Ephesians 5: v. He will not act without you. He will not drag you; He will draw you. He will not force you; He will persuade you. This command includes these two elements; God's appeal to you, and your response to His appeal. Personality is the supreme earthly gift of God to man. God has made you a person, and He will never obliterate your personality. That is the work of the devil, not of God. God has made you a person, and faith is relationship with a person. Faith is the relationship of you with God, of the sinner with the Saviour, of the child with the Father, of the creature with the Creator. And all the way through it is the same..

If you and I are ever to be filled with the Spirit, it must be on a similar basis of personal relationship between ourselves and God. God invites; we respond. The Lord Jesus says, Follow me. And as we follow, then this other thing happens, this miracle divine takes place in our lives: we are filled with the Spirit. And you say, "That is just where my difficulty comes in. I find it so hard to follow."

Let us set it out in this sequence. If I am to be well-pleasing to God, I must be filled with the Spirit. If I am to be filled with the Spirit, I must follow the Lord Jesus—unreservedly, without hesitation or argument. And you say, "It all ultimately comes back to me, and does it not ultimately depend upon what I do? And that is the very thing I cannot compass. It is here I am most helpless and crippled. It is just because I cannot do it that I have no victory in my life and no joy in my heart and no bright witness for Christ. You are shutting me up in a vicious circle. Is there no escape from it?" Turn over to Philippians 2 13, "For it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of His good pleasure." So you see that all the way through it is most surely His work. All the way through it is man's responsibility, and yet all the way through it is God's grace poured out upon the soul. If you decided to follow Christ last night, that was of God. Have you tried even to rise up and to go after Him? That was of God. Have you recognised and learned to rejoice in the evidences of God's working in your own soul? Do not sit down and mourn over your own ineffectiveness. That strange stirring of the heart as you listened to the message, it was God at work leading you into all the fulness of His grace and power. It is God that worketh in you the willing and the doing of His good pleasure. That deep, unconscious movement and reaction of your own soul to the divine call—it is all of God. That is where grace comes in.

That is the Gospel to announce, the Good News for the Christian as well as for the unsaved, the Good News for the saint as well as for the sinner. It is all of God from beginning to end. Just as surely as the new birth was of God, so truly your consecration, your sanctification, your holiness, your infilling of the Spirit will all be of God all the way through. And as He has brought us up to this point in our convention, bringing us face to face with His unescapable and drastic claims upon heart and life, and to what ought to be our ambition for life, He brings to us this command, which is to be the means by which all this can be realised—"Be filled with the Spirit." And the condition of filling is that you should crown Jesus; and your crowning of the Lord Jesus itself is the reaction of your own will to the divine strength. Have you ever seen a mother trying to teach her baby to walk? Its little legs are kicked out, and the whole body is tense with the excitement of the

effort that is being put forth to walk. Yet underneath the weak little arms are the mother's strong hands. The baby thinks it is doing it all, but it is mother who is really at the back of everything. It is like that with God. Remember that much more than you want to be filled, God wants to fill you. Much more than you want to be ambitious, He is ambitious for you— your life to live for Christ, and your lips to speak for Him. When Jesus comes, as perhaps He soon will, you will stand before His judgment seat unashamed because you have sought to please Him. What is God's ambition for you?

And it is God who gives you His Spirit, and He will fill you now. And it is God who Himself will enable you to fulfil the conditions upon which alone He can fill your life with the Holy Spirit.

So as we bring our meeting to a close, shall we just venture on Him in faith? Shall we say to Him in our hearts, Thou hast spoken these things to me, and as I place the crown of my life at Thy feet, as I yield my all to Thee, I do believe that here and now, according to Thy Word, Thou wilt fill me with Thy Spirit." You may not feel anything—well, I hope you don't, and I hope you won't; because your filling, as your saving, does not in the least depend upon what you feel. It depends upon God's fact, not upon your faith. And when you dare, in the absence of all feeling and all emotion, to believe what God says, He fulfils His word. If you are willing that He should thus take your life and fill it and use it, He will do that which He has spoken to us of.

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