

Sons of Fresh Oil

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In Zechariah chapter 4 we find a detailed account of a vision the prophet had. He conversed with an angel, who explained the vision as it unfolded. Zechariah saw two olive trees standing beside a golden bowl (4:3), whose oil dripped off their leaves into golden pipes (4:12) and was dispensed from the presence of God.

The prophet was told, “These are the anointed ones [ben-yitshar] who stand before the God of the earth” (Zech. 4:14). The angel used a unique phrase found only once in Scripture. He called these anointed ones, “sons of fresh oil”. As I read this text I was struck by the profound implications of fresh oil, and the desperate need for it in our day. Ben-yitshar has a collective root meaning ‘servants producing light’ or ‘glistens when crushed’.

What might it mean for us to be sons of fresh oil? What is it to have gifts that are touched with fresh oil? Oh how we need servants who produce light and not smoke in this time. How we need light bearers born from the very presence of God, who glisten when crushed and whose broken lives of service express the glow of the gospel!

Fresh oil

There are two other references to fresh oil in Scripture. Manna is described as having “the taste of fresh oil” (Num. 11:8 KJV). God’s provision, heavens resource is marked by the taste of fresh oil. It was collected fresh, and it tasted fresh. But it was not ‘new’, for it was the same every day. But it was fresh. It was not manufactured by the hands of men, it came from heaven direct from the hands of God. It could not be stored up, but needed to be consumed. Christ is our daily bread, who came down from heaven and gave us life (John 6:33). Our contact, our consumption of Him is supposed to be sustenance for our souls - and it is supposed to be fresh! He tastes like fresh oil.

David provides us with the other reference to fresh oil. “My horn you have exalted like a wild ox; I have been anointed with fresh oil” (Psalm 92:10 NKJV). Contained in a psalm about Sabbath rest, David urges us to praise God for His love and relationship. David thanks God for fresh anointing found in the midst of being in His presence.

Christ is our Sabbath rest (Heb. 4:10). When we stand in His presence, we come to the throne of grace and cease from our carnal labouring, we obtain the grace we need to function (vs 16). In Him we cease from our efforts. We are induced with His presence and produce fresh oil that drips forth into the world.

Standing in His Presence

Art Katz preached a message recently on standing in God’s presence. His message was about Moses’ encounter up the mountain, when the Lord first delivered the Ten Commandments. In Exodus 24:12 we find the simple yet challenging phrase, “Come up to the mount and be there”.

Moses and Joshua, Aaron, Hur, Nadab, Abihu and seventy elders left the crowd camped in the wilderness and set off toward the mountain. The Lord called for the elders and the champions to wait at the base of the mountain with Aaron. Moses and Joshua climbed further and entered the cloud and tarried in it for six days. On the seventh day the Lord called for Moses, who climbed further still and entered the devouring fire on the mountain peak. There he tarried a further 33 days!

Come up and be there, said the Lord. What output, what productivity was obtained in tarrying 40 days? They did not climb to labour, to work, to accomplish. They had no agenda, they did not go to get, nor did they climb to see God. They went at God's request, to go and be. Not to go and do. But we know this for sure, not only did Israel receive the blessing of the covenant commandments as a result. Moses glowed, his very face shone. It glistened from his character being crushed. He was thereafter called the most humble man on earth.

Christ moved away from the crowd gathered in the wilderness. Upon coming to Caesarea Philippi, He fellowshiped with the twelve. Then He selected Peter, James and John and told them, "Come up with Me to the mountain". Together they climbed and together they entered the glory cloud. They saw Christ transfigured with Elijah and Moses: two prophets who knew what it was to stand in God's presence. There came only one command in that cloud, ringing with allusions to the first, "This is My Son, hear Him!".

Peter's flesh rose up and wanted to perform, to build, to construct, to make and manage. "Let us build tabernacles," he said. "Come up and be," came the resounding witness from heaven. Peter had yet to glisten, he had yet to shine for his crushing was not complete. but there would come a day, on a beach not far away where Peter would receive his fresh oil.

Jesus told his disciples, after restoring Peter, that they also needed to tarry. he commanded them wait in Jerusalem. Why? "That you may be clothed with power from on high". The only way to be clothed in such power is to tarry. Ten days of concerted waiting in the upper room before they also had a mountain top, glory-cloud, fire-storm, smoke-haze experience. And they also went forth changed, as sons of fresh oil.

Old manna vs fresh oil

What of those who dwelt at the base of that first mountain? They constructed a god of their own making, a golden calf. They prophesied from the upwelling of their efforts, and an idol came forth. A god of their sweat and toil, of energy and their own imagination. What of those who remained at the base of that last mountain? They found their efforts futile, their power matched and defeated by the demons present in just one boy.

Jeremiah contrasts for us the difference in ministry between those who sweat and those who tarry. He contrasts for us in chapter 23, two kinds of prophetic ministry: sons of old manna verses sons of fresh oil. Jeremiah lamented for the prophets of Jerusalem because their ministry was profane, soiled, polluted and defiled with human wisdom (Jer. 23:11).

They walked in lies and poured forth bitterness and gall upon the people; they brought forth visions of their own design; they mixed imagination with revelation; they ran without being sent; pretended to have dreams and stole words from one another.

Jeremiah contrasted this fleshy ministry with the valid and genuine. It is altogether another thing to have been in the presence of God. God confronts us with, "But if they had stood in my counsel..." (Jer. 23:22). He bids us to come up the mountain, burdened with waiting and uncompromising in stillness.

Who has stood in His counsel?
Who has perceived His word?
Who has waited long enough to hear Him?
Who has tarried in the cloud?
Who has marked His counsel?

Sons of fresh oil stand like olive trees in His presence. They drip the oil from the leaves of their lives, and it comes forth fresh each day. They go to be and not to do. But from standing in His presence they are marvelously changed, and they come forth with His counsel. They do not go to get, but they go to stand in His presence, to enjoy His Son. They are servants who produce light, who reflect the light of the Son, whose faces shine from standing in His glory.

Let us be those who glisten because our carnality has been crushed to powder. “Whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder “ (Matt. 21:44).

References

Katz, Arthur. “Come up and be there”. Audio from BCNZ, Auckland, 2001.
Katz, Arthur. “The spirit of prophecy”. Ben Israel, 1998.
