

The Empty Pot

by Derek Taylor

Step with me for a moment into a strange and surrealistic world of the imagination.

You walk into the kitchen one morning. You make yourself a pot of coffee. You reach for an empty cup. You turn to grasp your coffee pot. But when you turn back with it in your hand, you find an amazing thing has happened.

The empty cup you put on the table has filled itself with tea! This is a strange occurrence. Not only that, it's very annoying. After all, you really wanted coffee, not tea. You don't even like tea in the morning.

You decide to forget the coffee and make yourself a bowl of porridge for breakfast. Just the thing on a cold morning! It looks good in the pan. You get an empty dish. You're just about to put your porridge in the dish when you notice something decidedly odd.

The empty dish has filled itself with cold soup!

Now you're really angry. It's all very well having to take tea instead of coffee, but you're decidedly not going to take cold soup in place of your porridge!

What's happening, anyway? Why won't these vessels remain empty as is normal, instead of filling themselves up? And why do they insist on filling themselves with things you don't even want?

MY! That certainly would be a strange world to step into one Morning.

Actually though, it's not such a strange world at all. It's really just a simple analogy of the way in which many of us have thought we should run our spiritual lives.

What do I mean?

Well, consider first Jesus our Lord. He it was who said, "*I can of My own self do nothing.*" Jesus the carpenter knew something we all know — carpenters ordinarily can't raise the dead, heal the sick, or change water into wine. Indeed carpenters cannot do any spiritual activity at all. Neither can bus drivers, housewives, businessmen or any flesh and blood human self.

Yet Jesus the Christ, hearing the Father in Him, was instrumental in seeing the dead raised, the sick healed, and the water changed into wine.

"It is the Father dwelling in Me who is doing His work," said this same Jesus. It had to be the Father, because Jesus the carpenter was the emptiest vessel to appear on the earth, having *"emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant."* But Jesus the empty carpenter *"being found in human form"* was filled with the Father and became the full expression of all that the Father wanted to do through Him, even *"obedient unto death"*.

But what about us?

Many of us have been trying a different approach to spiritual manifestation. We have said to Jesus, *"Lord, forgive me for being unfruitful. Forgive me for being weak. Forgive me because*

the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. But I promise I'll try harder from now on. I'll go to church more. I'll fast. I'll pray. I'll be more loving. I'll be more active in witnessing."

Thus speaks an empty vessel which is trying to fill itself! Someone once said, "If you measure Me — by the limitations of John Smith, you can get nothing into manifestation — until you come to the recognition that Jesus had — *"I can of Myself do nothing"*— and stop trying to make this body do something."

This body can do nothing other than create a false image of doing something. All it can do is put up a show which impresses those who judge by appearance. It cannot produce the fruit of the Spirit. It can come up with merely a sham of righteousness.

So what is the Spirit saying to you if you find yourself in a period of unfruitfulness and failure?

Simply this: you are an empty vessel. Just look at yourself; you can do nothing! Be still then — don't be tempted into trying to fill yourself. Be still in your emptiness and know that *"I am God."* Let Jesus' words speak to you: *"Without Me you can do nothing."*

It's not that God has left you or gone away from you. No! He hasn't deserted you. That can never be. But He is making clear to you your true emptiness. He is setting you on the table as an empty cup. He has a pot of coffee waiting to fill you at His pleasure and good will. Don't you dare to try to fill yourself with tea!

And thus can the Christ in you do the works.

I spoke recently with a lady who was wondering why the Lord was not healing her. She didn't want to be healed for selfish reasons, but in order that she could work more for the Lord. She felt that the sickness was holding her back.

So I suggested that perhaps the Father was saying to her, *"Don't think that you can do something for me. You are saying, 'If only I had my health. Lord, think what I could do for you' — but what makes you think that My fruits are dependent on your health? My works can be done with or without your good health, as I choose."*

My comment seemed to speak to her and put her a little more at rest with herself. She could see that she had been trying to dictate the terms of fruitfulness to the Father.

I have a very bad memory myself. I have often felt that God could not use me much because of my bad memory. If only I had a better memory, how fruitful I could be. What foolishness! How did it take me so long to realize that this and other weaknesses point out to me that I am an empty vessel who can do nothing. And that my nothingness is to be filled by the works of the Father, not the works built on a better memory or a better anything in the flesh.

When you see your weakness or unfruitfulness, how tempting it is to try to sort it out for yourself. Especially if you attend a church which is under a legalistic ministry.

I lived under such a ministry for a number of years. I worked out recently that I had listened to more than 1,000 sermons in that period of time — well over 1,000 hours of legalistic preaching and teaching, most of it aimed at getting me to be a better Christian, to be more loving, more serving, etc. — and at the end of all that what I have finally come to know is that I am nothing!

The law has shown me that this flesh of mine is empty, devoid of the things of the Spirit. All of the trying and failing, all of the repentance, discouragement and despair has led me to a simple truth: "*the flesh can do nothing.*"

And now it has dawned — I am empty that I might be filled. Not improved. No, no, a thousand times no! But filled. So that as I hear from the Father within, that I can do, because it is He doing it and not me.

"*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.*" Perhaps like me you have at some point in your spiritual life taken these words literally and fasted. If so, then you'll know how painful it is after eighteen hours without food or water. You feel terrible. Your breath smells, your mouth tastes awful, your stomach feels knotted up, and you feel generally weak and pathetic. Humanly speaking, you wish you had never started!

But you stick it out. You have set this special time aside for prayer, study and meditation, seeking God through this discipline. You physically empty yourself as a way of humbling yourself before God. You feel it would be very wrong to take food or drink before the time you have appointed to finish your fast.

Now consider the spiritual counterpart to this. Would it not be just as wrong to fill yourself with spiritual gifts or fruits before God's appointed time to fill you?

"*They shall be filled.*" At the end of a fast you fill your empty self with food (and are very glad to do so). But there is a "fasting" at the end of which comes the promised filling from God. That period of "fasting" may also be painful. You may seem to be spiritually fruitless and empty. Because as a human vessel you are spiritually empty. And when you see it and know it and accept it, then shall you see the time of filling come. A filling not of yourself, but the fulfilling with the living bread and water of the Christ within.

This filling from within is the "*pure white linen*" righteousness of faith which replaces the "*filthy rags*" of human righteousness, with which we are prone to cover ourselves.

So many of us have seen the gifts and fruits of the Spirit which are described in the Bible as noble qualities to be reproduced in our lives by the effort of self-discipline — with God's help, of course. Some of us have even experienced a degree of success as far as outward appearances go. We have been able to improve the way we act toward others.

But finally most of us come to the point where we realize that despite all our efforts, we are at a dead end in our spiritual progress. We hit a low point of self-dissatisfaction and feel utterly defeated. And that's marvellous!

When we come to awareness of our emptiness, our nothingness, God shows us that He intends us to have victory right in the midst of this apparent spiritual low. But His way is not to change us into instant spiritual supermen with great powers. No, He has something else in mind.

First we must see our self-defeat as a revelation of our emptiness. But when this realization dawns, don't try to change yourself. For behind your acceptance of yourself as "nothing" is the still small voice of the inner Christ showing you that you already have the victory. This victory is recognition of your emptiness — a victory that is against all appearance.

"They shall be filled." Then nothing can shake them. *"I am He that fills you. You live, yet not you – I live. I live in you, I live as you."* Recognition of Him as our life, of Him as the one who fills us, brings victory in defeat. It means an end to striving and struggling to be filled. An end of trying to create a "Christian" image. Rejoice and be glad, you empty vessel. Be glad that God refuses to honor your self-effort. Be glad of this time of affliction, this time of frustration, this time of fruitlessness – this time of hunger and thirst of your soul. For when you accept yourself as you are – as the "nothing" of an empty vessel – without condemning yourself any longer, the promise is that you *"shall be filled!"* Indeed, you already are – and in His time the manifestation will come forth.