

The power of the Spirit

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[0 : 00] Please have your Bibles ready as we enter the subject of the power of the Spirit.! I wonder what your reaction is to that particular title.

! I could be speaking today about the gentleness of the Holy Spirit or the wisdom of the Holy Spirit. But today the subject is the power of the Spirit and I think that always creates a reaction.

And I want to just explore those reactions and to see where we fit in that before going into the main body of the message.

So your immediate reaction as a 21st century Christian in this city today might be, Ah, this is about signs and wonders.

So if you're into that territory, you may be very encouraged because you feel, Well, this is exactly what I love to hear about. Let's have it. More of this.

[1 : 14] We need to hear about the Spirit as the author of visible and remarkable happenings. And we have a Bible that tells us of those things because there we have it in the book of Acts.

And we find it all extensively reported in Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Extraordinary things happening in those days.

And not just in those days, but in time subsequently and today. So you may stand on a spectrum on this particular matter.

But I would suggest to you that God is at work and doing remarkable things in this world. Not necessarily in this city, but doing remarkable things in this world.

And there are extraordinary testimonies that we are still hearing about the work and the power of the Spirit. That may be your reaction when you hear this phrase and you think, That's exactly what he's going to talk about this morning.

[2 : 23] He's going to talk about that topic. Of course, when you hear this phrase, the power of the Spirit, your reaction to it may be a reaction to the first one.

Oh no. What is going to be said about this in a very positive way or possibly in a very negative way? And I suggest that for many people and for many Christians and even evangelical Christians, there is a concept of how people become Christians and a concept of how we go on as Christians, which I could describe as learn and follow.

So we are very pleased and proud to have our Bibles in our own language in an explainable fashion. So that I can sit down with you afterwards and say, Let us look at this particular passage of the Bible to see what God has to say.

Because God is clear. God speaks to us in language which we can understand. It is intelligible. It is to go into our minds.

[3 : 40] We are being given capacity and God has spoken to us through the prophets and lastly by his Son in such a manner that we can receive what he has to say.

This unknowable God has deigned to make himself known and has spoken to us through the Bible. Well, it is a very precious gift, isn't it? And it is certainly the case that we put ourselves into our most dangerous position if we do not open our Bibles and we do not hear what God has to say.

Because God has spoken fully and comprehensively and sufficiently for us so that what we need to know he has told us. So that here we may find the story of how a man and a woman, a boy or a girl can be saved, come to know God, their true God, and to live a life for him and with him now and forever in eternity.

So what a precious, precious thing that is that we could do so. And so I might just extend that logic to say, pick up your Bibles, go home, read the Bible, immerse yourself in it, find books to help you, and all will be well.

[5 : 11] That's all you need to do is to feed your mind and to get rid of all the claptrap of modern, secular stuff which gets in the way of our thinking and to put yourself under the bright light of God's truth.

And I would recommend you pick up your Bibles. And I would recommend that you take them seriously. I would recommend that you apply your mind strongly to this truth.

There is no encouragement from God for us to be closing our Bibles and just be waiting for some sort of supernatural event to occur.

That's a dishonor to the God who has graciously given us his word. So learn and follow.

Maybe that's the answer. It's a reaction to the first position, I would say, to those who feel, this is just flesh.

[6 : 30] Put your head on again. Use the mind that God has given you. But I suggest it's also a reflection of the rationalistic and science-based model of Western thinking that we are all subject to.

In the past, people believed in miracles. In medieval days, when people went into the vast churches, they were just overawed by those amazing supernatural things that occurred.

But now in the modern age, when we can explain everything, that space for the stuff that can't be understood has grown smaller and smaller and smaller.

And so we put everything into the box if it can be explained. It can be explained. It can be explained. Use your mind, use your mind, use your mind. And Christians don't reject that entirely, but it's easy for us to be completely swamped by that.

So that we might say, learn and follow. Learn and follow.

[7 : 58] I would put a third thing down here, which I haven't got on the screen here, but I'll say this to you. That we live in an age when we have not seen in this country for many decades such a movement of the powerful spirit of God upon this land that we are tempted to alter our theology to suit current spiritual realities.

So we dismiss those things that are said within the word and make them historical and not current.

So we have adjusted our theology to make it fit the culture in which we now find ourselves.

And this happens subtly. But we need to allow the Bible to speak for itself rather than to us to read it through our own cultural lens.

So if we're here today and we have little expectation of the supernatural or sense a need for it, we are the poorer for it, but I have to say it's not surprising.

[9 : 30] It's not surprising that even those of us who claim an evangelical faith could be in a place that we have little expectation of the supernatural or the sense and need for it.

Signs and wonders you know those little crazy mirrors used to have on the piers and other places you go to and you can look into it and there's a real person there but you go in front of the mirror and the person is completely distorted and extended.

And I want to say about the issue of signs and wonders there's a real, there's something there but it's an unbalanced and a lopsided picture if that's all that you are seeing.

It tends to separate the spirit from the work of the spirit. And there's a very interesting little story that's given in the book of Acts about somebody who was not a Christian who saw signs and wonders and what he wanted to do when he saw those signs and wonders.

When Simon saw that the spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands he offered them money. And said give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.

[11 : 05] So he had the words. He knew it was the Holy Spirit. He knew it was something supernatural. And he thought I'd like some of that. Pass over some money.

Give me the power and I'll do it. Well isn't that appalling? But that's the danger of the tendency when signs and wonders are emphasised as what the spirit is about.

Because it does the spirit of God a great dishonour by separating him from the works that he may or may not do. And to suggest excitement in the work and not in the spirit.

And this rather I was trying to think of some pictorial illustration of what I had in mind but it basically is an open door and basically somebody or something has gone out of that door and is no longer present.

Whatever the spirit did in the past he's not doing it now. He's effectively absent or passive. So we work that out by saying there is enough grace out there and in us to enable us to become Christians and go on as Christians.

[12 : 34] Let me just repeat that because I thought about this carefully. So I think this is how we think about this in our heads or we can do. There's enough grace out there somehow God is just gracious in this world to enable us to become Christians and go on as Christians.

And you can work it this way that if you become a Christian so the Holy Spirit has come to you in some fashion and it's just like he's got the clockwork process going in your life and all you have to do is just do your responsibility.

Read your Bible be obedient to God follow what he says and you'll just be fine. I want to speak today about the Spirit and hopefully for you to be able to go away from this time in the Holy Spirit of God is so, so, so much greater than I ever thought he was.

So that you might pick up your Bible again and you would see all those references have just sort of gone past you in the past where the Spirit of God is referred to because he is in the whole of the Bible.

from Genesis 1-1 the Spirit was upon the water to 22-17 the Spirit and the Bride said come. It's really lovely to see the breadth of the Spirit's involvement.

[14 : 22] So let's dismiss absolutely completely at this point this idea that the Spirit just appeared in the book of Acts and sort of it just fell away after that.

That's completely unbiblical. He's active in the Old Testament he's active in the New Testament he's active now. He's never been inactive.

The Spirit does what the Spirit does. The vastness of the work of the Spirit. I did a quick trawl through just looking at passages in the New Testament after the Gospels and found 100 plus references to the Spirit.

They're probably more the word in the original language is translated in different ways. We need to be careful sometimes it refers to the Spirit of a man sometimes to the Spirit of God the third person of the Trinity.

Let's say that there's at least 100 references very clear statements about the work of the Spirit. Probably a dozen of those refer to what you would call the signs and wonders territory of the work of the Spirit.

[15 : 37] Even from a proportionality point of view you have to say there is a lot more about the work of the Spirit that could just be put into the bracket of signs and wonders. We need to start well where do we start?

Enormous Bible study potentially but let us not forget and let us be clear and go straight into this territory that the Spirit has an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.

And I have three texts on the screen in front of you. The first refers to the baptism of Jesus rather extraordinary in a way. The start of his public ministry demonstration of the Father's appointment and anointing of the Son for the task that he had for him to do.

And John the Baptist says I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. a very visible demonstration to all who were there and given to us of course through the Bible to demonstrate the Spirit came down.

Later on it is said that the Spirit was given to him without measure without measure. Jesus Christ knew that personally he went into the synagogue in Nazareth and it was he who realised that Isaiah was being fulfilled on that day.

[17 : 05] The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. Everything that Jesus Christ did as man had to be and was accomplished in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 9.14 is one particular example. Christ who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God. That was the way it had to be.

That was God's appointment of the process. It is also a wondrous example to us as Jesus is the example for his followers of the way things need to be.

That we cannot live our lives and we cannot obey God and please him unless we have the presence and filling of the Holy Spirit.

and Peter said in one of his sermons in Acts 10.38 God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power. That was just a fact.

[18 : 17] I put it this way Jesus Christ needed the Holy Spirit of God in his life. God it was not a sort of nice bolt on extra a nice resolution of a Trinitarian puzzle.

It was an absolute necessity that Jesus the man should live his life in the power of the Holy Spirit.

so that he might be pleasing to God and the father might accept the sacrifice that he eventually made upon the cross of Calvary.

It was Jesus himself who knowing the wondrous enabling of the Spirit promised that that self same spirit would be given to his followers.

So please turn to John 14 verses 16 to 18. If you love me you will obey what I command and I will ask the father and he will give you another counsellor to be with you forever the spirit of truth the world cannot accept him because it neither sees him nor knows him but you know him for he lives with you and will be in you.

[20 : 04] I will not leave you as orphans I will come to you. It's a great passage there are such depths here aren't there? and they're getting sad and sorrowful it's the last hours of Jesus life upon earth before the crucifixion and he's told them I'm going to be leaving I'm going to be leaving they're sad and sorrowful they're feeling like orphans and he says don't feel that way I am going to come to you but how are you going to come to us?

I'm going to give you another counsellor a comforter one to be with you so that whatever you have experienced of me you will know through this other one the essential companion one like Jesus one who is unknown to the world verse 17 the world can't accept him doesn't recognise him no place for him it's a secret treasure that belongs to those who are chosen by God not just to be with them but to be in them which was an experience that those disciples had never had up to that time though they had spent three years with Jesus Christ he had been with them but now he's going to be in them and so we saw that in a wonderful measure on the day of

Pentecost and they're going to really feel cared for it's a beautiful picture isn't it it's a promise I will ask the father he'll give you another counsellor how sure is that Jesus says the father always hears me and he certainly heard that prayer a relationship is to be brought about which is to be respected and nurtured this is the language of relationship this is the language of closeness intimacy nearness the spirit makes us

Christians the holy spirit sets us apart for Jesus Christ there are many places in the word where the spirit is referred to in a one word way the spirit and there are also many places in the word where the holy spirit is referred to why why should we have the name the holy spirit there is father there is son they're not called holy father although Jesus occasionally refers to his father in that fashion we don't read of holy son but why the holy spirit well that's a good question it's probably much much broader than any of us could possibly imagine but I want to suggest that a prime part of what the holy spirit does is he sets apart the people that God has chosen for Jesus Christ possession and do you remember when we were talking about holiness and the meaning of it we said the first meaning of it was separate separate make a difference and that's what the holy spirit does he makes a difference in a room like this he's making a difference he has separated some people for the savior for Jesus

Christ possession and there are others who are not experiencing that have not experienced it yet or pray God that might be your experience but I'm saying in this world there is that separation that the holy spirit makes and he does so by his power because when he has come says Jesus he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment if you pick up your bible and you just read those things and it's extraordinary to hear the stories of people who have just done this two people can pick up the same bible and the same passage and read in the same way and go through the same intellectual process and one person comes away and says like the publican and the pharisee have mercy upon me sinful man sinful man well how has that happened is it something to do with their mind is it something to do with their intellectual understanding not to do with that at all it's to do with the work of the holy spirit which convicts convinces people of the reality of sin the extreme danger of it because they're under the judgment of god in such a fashion that people are consumed by this and it's almost like nothing else in the life matters

[25 : 47] Jesus says this is what the holy spirit comes to do Paul says in titus god saved us by the washing of rebirth and renewal by the holy spirit that's how he saved us it was by the work of the spirit for we know says paul brothers loved by god that he has chosen you how did we know how did we know he stood up in thessalonica one morning and as he preached the message he knew that the word was going with power because there were people who were probably weeping in that audience there were people who came up to him afterwards and said i've got a load of idols what do i do with them now and they were deeply convicted they didn't rush out the door they stayed they needed to pray they needed to cry out to god and he knew that the word had had an effect you

remember paul when he's at the areopagus and some they hear him talking about the resurrection and some of them saying we'll hear you again about this we'll come back next week hear you again okay that's not bad that's not bad and many people do that they come in and they say that was a nice talk that gave me something to think about i've heard so many people say that you know that gave me something to think about go out the door you forget about it life goes on when the holy spirit comes he may do that but they may just come that day when you're hearing the same message you've heard a hundred times and that message comes to you with holy spirit power and when that happens you know it's god and paul was very plain he said i'm not going to come to you with great eloquence i'm not going to come with you with oratory i'm not going to stir you up just by saying things in a sort of bold and loud way or playing intoxicating emotional music and so forth i'm determined not to go down that route because i don't want what happens to be put at the court of of sort of human emotion i'm really wanting god to be speaking in this situation so i just tell you plainly what the word of god says and as you hear the word of god if it is faithfully spoken god will be pleased by his spirit to make use of it so that day may come and maybe there are people in this particular group here you could get up now right now and you could tell me i remember that day maybe you weren't in church maybe you were just at home maybe you just read something you remember that day i want to read you a little story of a gentleman at the end of the first war so it's approximately 100 years ago now he was on board a ship in kingston harbour near dublin and his name is jock troop he was converted and he was serving in the royal naval patrol service during the first world war a godly couple were conducting a gospel meeting each sunday evening at the ymca hall in dublin after listening to the preaching on one occasion jock cheerfully said to mr west i think i'll get converted he goes on to describe his experience little did i think that god would take me at my word something laid hold of my life and i became utterly miserable

i tried to throw it off but the conviction deepened we left for patrol the next day monday and i could never explain the awful misery of that week day and night i was like a hunted man my sin was before me every moment i tried to get rid of it by resolving to turn over a new leaf but it seemed the more i tried the more my conscience smoked me i stopped swearing and gambling tried to give up smoking when none of these things could give me peace i made up my mind that i would go and speak to mr west whenever our time of patrol finished the burden had grown till it kept me from sleeping lest i should die and wake up in hell how faithfully my wife dealt with me by showing me the scriptures what christ had accomplished on my behalf i listened to it all but couldn't grasp the wonderful truth of it she then prayed for me and got others to pray for me but it seemed to me that i was beyond hope i left the building feeling like one of the damned while arriving at the ship however i opened the wheelhouse door and got on my knees and cried to god to save me for jesus sake my burden simply rolled away and the deliverance was so sweet that i rushed into the cabin to tell the crew what had happened the cards were on the table as usual the members of the crew were awaiting my return to have a hand what a shock when i told them i was saved some mocked and gave me a few days to hold out but praise god he's led me on this dear gentleman was responsible under god the preaching of the word of god during one of the last revivals that has happened in this nation plenty more testimonies in the book like this you should read them this is what god does this is the work of the holy spirit the spirit makes us christians however you've come to know jesus christ today and we're not all in that same category and some have come slowly and some have come through the blessing of a christian background and childhood and so forth but at some point or another the holy spirit of god has made a difference because you were born dead in your trespasses and sin and you have been made alive by jesus christ through the power of the spirit and however that has happened we give the glory to god father son and holy spirit you did not choose him he chose you he set his love upon you he called you out of his darkness out of darkness into his marvelous light it is as binary as that you were dead and you've made me made alive and if even if all you can whimper that little noise of thanks or shout it to the rooftops that's your position well hallelujah because he's done it and he will not go back on it he will not unravel it he's had a purpose for all eternity and it's played out in time the spirit sanctifies us as christians remember it's the holy spirit again and what does the holy spirit do he separates us and he makes us holy he makes us holy what do i mean by that i'll put it this way he makes us more and more like Jesus Christ from the beginning says Paul God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the spirit Romans 15 he says so the gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God sanctified by the spirit the holy spirit makes us holy he

changes us into the likeness of Jesus he changes our character so that an evidence of the holy spirit's work in the life of somebody who gets up and says I've been saved is to see the fruit of the spirit demonstrated in that person's life love joy peace faithfulness gentleness self-control if the holy spirit knows you because he saved you then he will also be at work to do those things and it is a right assessment of ourselves to find out whether that is happening the spirit sets us apart for service so that we are equipped and commissioned to do the thing which

God has called us to do the spirit gives gifts as he chooses so there is a multiplicity of his gifts present in this room today the spirit guides us he leads it is a definition of what it is to be a Christian that we are led by the spirit there are times when he will prevent us from doing things thank God for that the spirit creates unity amongst the body of his people which is a blessing and an enormous privilege isn't it maintaining the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace the spirit grants us assurance because there are times when Satan accuses us and says you don't belong to the Lord Jesus Christ at all there's plenty of evidence in your life to say you failed him badly but the spirit and from time to time gives us personal assurance that we belong to him so the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit that he has given to us that we have a seal upon us which is like a deposit it says guaranteeing what is to come later that as assured as all the people of God will be as they stand before the throne of grace and worship in eternal bliss we have foretaste of that now so that you and I can say Abba Father Abba Father I failed I know I've made a wreck of so many things I have not been obedient and so forth but yet I know the spirit of sonship in me that I cry Abba Father I know you're my father he grants a spiritual understanding so that a child can pick up this book and understand it so much better than a university professor because you have been given anointing if you're a Christian person you've been given an anointing you read these words and you're nourished you're fed your soul is strengthened and refreshed by the word of God and who does that it's the spirit he helps us Paul says in Philippians how he how he how he has been so blessed by the prayers helped by the prayers and the spirit of God so that he is not ashamed of this message but has courage and every day

[37 : 42] Paul gets up from his bed and you think oh he's a very capable sort of preacher no problem for him to do all this stuff not at all he says I'm trembling I could have just stayed silent but the spirit of God helped me and gave me courage to say the things I needed to say the spirit of God gives an overflow of hope in the hearts of believers what a lovely word that is what a blessing it is that we are a people of hope in a world that has no hope no genuine hope no hope that can stand the test of time we are a people who have hope what is our hope it doesn't rest in this world of course I hope that by God's grace and the power of the spirit he will bring me safely home to my eternal home and he gives strength he gives power and he speaks to us and he speaks to the churches as he did repeatedly in the book of revelation hear what the spirit says to the churches what's he saying to this church now that's supernatural the spirit might be saying a thousand things we could say

I mean there's a thousand things that could be talked about what is the holy spirit saying to us now we need to know that we need to hear it it's not good enough to simply open the bible and say well I'll start at genesis and just work through it no we need to know what the holy spirit is saying now to us in our own lives and in the life of this church and the spirit glorifies us as christians he glorifies us as christians the holy spirit leads us into the eternal presence of the holy god so that we are people who will be brought safely home because the blessings and callings of god are without repentance he doesn't turn back on what he's proposed to do and those he's begun a good work in he will complete to the day of jesus christ and you can say quite truly as you sit in that chair if i look back on this last week i have absolutely no confidence that i'm going to find myself in glory one day unashamed before the judgment seat of christ no confidence made such a wreckage of my life you know we've all done that but praise god god is greater than us greater than our our wrecked lives and he has a wonderful wonderful way of taking those who were rebels and making them saints that truly do bring glory to his name his work completes the great design and fills the soul with joy divine so here are the implications we will acknowledge and we will honour and we will welcome the work of the holy spirit we want to welcome the holy spirit of god in our lives are you up for that if you're a christian that's your position you have to be you will not ignore him you'll welcome him desire and pray for more of the holy spirit work in your life do you dare to pray that prayer do you really want to pray that prayer it's a safe prayer to pray because it's really saying

I want more and more of Jesus Christ in my life I want more and more of Jesus Christ to be manifested in this world and we will depend and we will submit to the holy spirit of god we will listen to his promptings and his preventions and we will depend upon him and that's why we are praying people we pray because we believe that only god can do things only god can do things every single one of us is a miracle from god we belong to him and we pray for many many many more miracles to be taking place in this city in our families and our friends our work colleagues we're praying for those miracles and we need to depend upon the work of the holy spirit we have our responsibility we will preach the gospel we will share the gospel but we know

I know as if it was cold steel I know my words will not persuade anybody into the kingdom of heaven right can't be done cannot be done it's a falsehood there's no meeting I can invite anybody to and say you come here you become a Christian it's the work of the spirit of god now here's the crunch is this high on our expectancy level on our agenda to pray to pray in such a fashion to pray in such a fashion that Jesus Christ might be glorified by more of the work of the holy spirit i still believe i still believe that in meetings like this there can and will be moments where people will be broken by the power of the spirit of god where people who are as far away from god as it's possible to be can be broken by the power of the spirit of god in their lives in this little bubble of history that we're living in in this time we haven't seen this the last recognizable revival that i can refer to is in 1921 in east anglia and you read about it in the book i just was reading to 1921 a hundred years ago it feels like a million years ago but people who were falling down on their faces before god unconverted couples coming into a building unknown to each other one was sitting on one side one on the other they were both converted that night whole families whole families becoming christians people about to commit suicide because of the state of their lives and their feeling of the awful wrath of god upon them but wonderfully a christian was diverted because they responded to the prompting of the spirit went and had a conversation they led that person to jesus christ ordinary working people falling on their knees in country lanes under the weight and the oppression of sin in their lives and calling out to god for mercy well it happened in 1921 you go and visit all the spots there i believe that god by spirit sovereignly can do that in brighton in viaduct road amongst us in god's providence we may not see that but i still pray for it and will pray for it and in the knowledge that anyone who comes to the lord jesus christ has come by the power of his spirit but all for a greater measure of that oh for a greater measure of that brothers and sisters please let us not be cynical on this matter please let us not shuffle it into the dustbin of history and say that was then and this is now these are the things which the church of jesus christ experienced in the early days and which has repeatedly happened in history since then read the stories because that will help you pray read the stories and be encouraged in that fashion because you think your son is beyond redemption it's not the case is it paul said i was a chief of sinners your unconverted partner they can be saved not by your words but certainly by the spirit of god all our dear children the sunday club now by the spirit of god we pray that they'll be saved amen