

The Spirit Invades

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Preacher: Alex Pett

[0 : 00] Good morning. Good to see you all.! So, someone's last words or last moments can be profound, even sacred.

! A friend of mine had the tragic experience of his teenage sister getting cancer and then dying. And the family of Christians and the whole way through they sought God, prayed until they had no words left.

And they were all gathered together in the last moments of her life. And the cancer really ravaged her severely and she'd gone blind at this point. And so they stood around just waiting, knowing it wouldn't be long.

And somehow his sister had just kept her faith. And so it doesn't change the truth about who Jesus is for all of us. And then there was this moment he described that she suddenly opened her eyes, looked at the corner of the room, smiled this enormous smile, and her face lit up.

And then she died. And he said he could just feel the presence of the Holy Spirit in the room. And just earlier than the reading Deb has done, we hear Jesus' last words to his disciples.

[1 : 29] Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father has promised, which you have heard me speak about. That John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you. And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea, Samaria, to the ends of the earth. And after this, after he said this, he was taken up before their eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

So you can see this foretelling, Jesus saying, this is what is going to happen next. Wait, and the Holy Spirit will come for you.

This incredible narrative of Jesus dying, breaking the power of sin and death, rising again, spending some time with the disciples over these 40 days.

And then the final words, the Holy Spirit is coming. And we have recently referenced in the talks, John 14 and 16, of Jesus saying, I must go so the Holy Spirit can come to be with you.

[2 : 42] The counsellor. Now, Russ, last week, talked about meet the Holy Spirit. How many of you were here last week and heard Russ or heard him online?

So a good number of us. Great. And then not long ago, Rob Scott Cook talked about faithfulness in prayer and the experience of the Holy Spirit. How many of you were here on that particular day?

So a good number as well. Great. So Russ was saying, well, the Holy Spirit is God's gift so that we can encounter and the revelation of who Jesus is and experience Jesus move in our lives.

Bringing the peace, fulfilness, grace, forgiveness, healing that we might need. And he reminded us in Ephesians 5, it says, where he should be filled continuously.

So initial encounter of being filled with the Holy Spirit, but then successive moments and experiences of being filled with the Holy Spirit. Rob, when he spoke, said he believes that we need to expect a fresh wave of God's Spirit at Christ's church through prayer.

[3 : 53] And here we are in a month where we're leading up to our 48 hours of prayer at the month. He also describes the Holy Spirit as a birthright for all Christians.

A birthright. And so here in this story of Acts 2, this remarkable moment of the Holy Spirit being poured out on this group of disciples as they waited.

It seems to be both corporate, they're all experiencing it, and individual and immensely personal for them as well as they then speak out in tongues.

And then you start to see that then spreading to the 3,000. And so for me as I read this, I just see this image of what God's heart is for church, for us gathering, that we should be encountering God in a profound way.

And then able to take something of God's life and love to those around us in our community. And here we are, gathered together. Here may be, as I talked about last time, coming not with empty hands, but with our wrestle and when we're wrestling with sin and repentance.

[5 : 04] Here with our pain as well. Here with our praise and our thanks. Here with others on our minds to pray for, those in this town. Maybe those you know in the pub, or your club, or your schools, or in the workplace, or those you don't know yet but have a heart for in this town.

And all those prayers are really a request for the Holy Spirit to move. So as I prepared for this morning, I really asked God, what is it you actually want to say?

Not what I like to say. It's generally a good start. I love how God say very clearly to me, give me space, I will work. I then sent the plan to Kate saying, here's my plan.

And he just said that at the top with an empty page, which he was highly amused by. Your usual level of preparation, Alex, she said. So I just want to touch on something briefly, and then we're going to take time to pray.

And just have a bit of space to allow the Holy Spirit to really move. I just want to touch on how the Holy Spirit has, is, and I think will be moving amongst.

[6 : 17] I mentioned last week that I grew up in the Catholic Church. And I had this experience of going to Mass, of communion, going and telling the priests my sins, asking for forgiveness, all this sort of rhythm of experience.

But it was very much external. It was all outside of me. It was kind of this ritual. And when I had the experience of meeting this revelation of who Jesus was, this revelation of when you're a Christian, it's actually giving your life to Jesus and asking the Holy Spirit to fill you.

In that moment, I experienced being filled with a peace, a life, just an incredible sense of completeness. And when I opened my eyes, I looked at the world differently.

Then it became this internal experience, where it moved from ritual to relationship and encounter, and a sense of the Holy Spirit meeting with me and then filling me.

And that's our hope for us as a church community. And that's why in our vision and our plan for the church going forward is renewal in the Holy Spirit. That we would know that encounter deeply, frequently, bringing life, peace, and healing to us.

[7 : 41] Russ gave the same narrative, as he taught last Sunday, about that encounter of the Holy Spirit, just a sense of internal experience of God's love and in meeting with him.

Now, sometimes the Holy Spirit, I think, moves in quite dramatic ways, and sometimes in very ordinary, gentle ways. I want to tell you a couple of stories of each.

After having this encounter with God, one evening I was cycling across Cheltenham. And it was a really hot evening, and I put my helmet in my bag because it was that warm, which is a really stupid thing to do.

And as I came up to a junction, someone drove round a blind corner on the wrong side of the road, my right of way, and drove into me. And I went straight through the windscreen, head first.

And I still have the memory of the steering wheel in my back, looking up this way, and seeing the face of the driver, looking a little startled.

[8 : 46] And I swung myself out of the, underneath the top of the windscreen, slid off the bonnet, brushed all the glass off me, and went, oh, I think I'm okay. The driver wasn't so okay.

But it serves them right, really. And I wasn't very gracious. And I called my friend Andrew and said, oh, you can't believe what happened to me yesterday. He said, was that at 10 o'clock at night? I said, yes.

He said, I felt the Holy Spirit prompt me, pray for Alex's safety. I said, I prayed for you about 20 minutes, thought, I think he's all right now. And then stopped. But a sense of the Holy Spirit just working amongst us, prompting us, nudging us.

I want to read something from this book by Henry Cloud. A reader of Henry Cloud? He's a Christian psychiatrist, and a prolific writer, and a pretty remarkable person.

Here's a short story from him. It was the end of the day. I was in my office after seeing patients, and my pager went off. I called my answering service, and they patched me through to a woman on the phone, calling from a phone booth.

[9 : 55] I knew who she was. A new patient I'd been seeing just for a couple of weeks, but she was pretty depressed. I discussed with her the possibility of a hospital if the depression got worse, and she'd resisted.

Hey, I said, what's happening? Nothing, she said, in what I could tell was a voice that did not sound good. But I wanted to call you, and thank you for trying to help me.

I know you want to, but I just can't do this. I just can't. So thank you anyway. And she hung up. I was afraid. In fact, I knew, well, what this meant.

She said she was not planning on killing herself, and had promised me she would call me if she ever felt that way. But I knew at that moment, something had happened, and she'd changed and made a decision she was going to do it.

I had no idea where she was, how to get to her or find her. This is before cell phones. I called her home, but no one was there. I was totally in the dark and very scared.

[11:06] When I feel scared, I pray. So I did. I asked God to keep her safe. There's nothing else I could do until, until I felt prompting to get in my car and look for her.

But it made no sense. I had no idea where she would be. Southern California is a big place, and I'd not know where to begin. But I followed this urge.

I went to my car. I felt a nudge from somewhere to drive to the South Coast Plaza, a really large shopping center in Costa Mesa, California, about 15 minutes away.

I truly do not remember why. If it just came to my mind, or if I felt a leading from God, or I had wondered maybe she was shopping there, I don't remember.

I had no idea whether or not she'd be there. What I do know is that there was no way to find her, even if that was right. It is massive. It has over 250 stores and what seems like miles of parking lots and streets in many directions.

[12:07] Even if she was there, how could I find her? The entrants are in several streets and different blocks. No way to know where to begin. But I began driving.

When I got to the general area, when the turn-off started, and there are various parking lot options, think basically like Disneyland, I just felt guided to the next turn. A nudge to turn here, and then there.

Different lots and different complexes, and rows and rows of cars. Each stop would be like that. Not knowing what to do other than get an internal nudge to go this way or that.

Exactly like the day, years before, when God led me to a pastor. Different great story. I turned down a new row of cars, and there it was, her car.

I recognised it from seeing her in the parking lot. It was hers for sure. I drove up to it and didn't see anyone in it. I got out, and there she was, lying on the back seat, staring at her space, pretty detached.

[13:09] She had pills and was ready to take them. Tragedy averted. God has saved her. An incredible sense of the Holy Spirit prompting and nudging and saving a life.

But the Holy Spirit moves in really ordinary, simple ways as well. Just this week, I felt prompted to text a friend.

I don't often text him. I've known him for about 15 years. I think I sent him one verse once before in that time, but I just felt this particular verse for him. It said, hey, I was just thinking about you. I think this verse might be relevant.

He texted back immediately saying, another friend has just sent me that. So you know, just a prompt from the Holy Spirit. In the ECC this week, this was our church council if you're not familiar with it, sort of in the background helping, trying to make things run well, and we just stopped on a topic we were talking about.

We said, we need to pray. And we paused, we waited five minutes and then we checked in with each other. What's the Holy Spirit saying? We need God's guidance. And then I was talking to a friend here in Christ Church.

[14:17] He was just talking about their experience when Rob Scott Cook spoke. They came forward for prayer really felt, filled the Holy Spirit. Spoke in tongues, which they haven't done for a long time.

And I said, and what was your experience? And they said, it was wonderful. It's like coming home. This incredible sense of when we open our hearts up to the Holy Spirit, then it's a safe place to go. We want to take a bit of time now just to pray, to wait on the Holy Spirit. And let's start that now. Lord, we just come before you. All of us from different places, different contexts, different situations, we open our hearts to you.

We thank you for those stories of you on the move, Holy Spirit. We thank you for that image of your church, of you, Holy Spirit, pouring out on the disciples and then spreading into that group of 3,000. We thank you for that encounter with you, which is so personal, but also for all of us together. So Lord, as we wait on you now, would you lead us, Holy Spirit?

[15 : 25] Would you fill this place and meet with us all? In your name, Lord Jesus. Thank you. Thank you, God. Amen. Thank you.