

The Spirit Influences

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 November 2025

Preacher: Rev. Dr. Russell Herbert

[0 : 00] He was so excited because he'd managed to secure one ticket to the Cup Final.

! Always had longed to go. And yet he knew that although he was very, very lucky to get hold of what he believed to possibly be the last remaining ticket to that game, it was probably about the worst seat in the entire stadium.

He arrived, he'd made his way up the steps and got higher and higher and higher and higher and further and back and further and back and further and back and further and back until eventually he was standing there right at the very back, at the very top, thinking to himself, I couldn't be any further away from all of the action from this, probably about the worst view in the place, but nevertheless, I'm here.

But about 15, 20 minutes into the game, this guy noticed that right down at the very front, there appeared to be an empty seat. Nobody seemed to be making their way as a late arrival to that seat. Eventually it got to half time.

And the man thought to himself, I'm going to make my way down there. Just on the off chance that seat could be mine. Well, eventually, and it took him ages, but he managed to get there and spoke to one person and said, do you know anything about this empty seat?

[1 : 35] And they just shook their head. Went to the next guy next to him and said, do you know anything about this? Is this an empty seat? He said, yes, it is indeed. Nobody's sitting there. In fact, I bought the ticket.

He said, this is the cup final. And you've got a ticket for yourself and an empty seat. He said, well, there's a story behind it. He said, all my life I'd wanted to come to this game as well.

My wife, who absolutely hates it, I insisted that I got a ticket for her as well. So she was going to join me. But sadly, very recently, she passed away.

The other guy didn't quite know what to say. He said, well, that's really, really sad. But you decided to come anyway. He said, I decided to come anyway. It's what she would have wanted, even though she couldn't bear coming to things like this.

He said, well, sorry, it's not my business, but could someone else have not come with you? A friend or a family member? He said, well, no.

[2 : 39] They're all at the funeral. I don't think that one's a true story.

But let me put this question to you, and it's a serious, genuine one. Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you've been presented with a situation, a set of circumstances, and frankly, you've been lost for words?

Because the situation that you're being presented with is frankly terrible. It's outrageous. And inside, you're thinking, I feel I should say something here, but I don't really know that it's my place to challenge it.

Have you ever been in that situation? That's Paul as he writes these words to the Ephesians. Wake up.

We would probably say, wake up and smell the coffee. Paul says, wake up, oh sleeper. Rise from the dead. Christ will shine on you.

[3 : 57] Paul does not begin by talking about discipleship lifestyle. That's not his starting point. The first few chapters of Ephesians, he's unpacking what God has done for you.

And he sets out in a systematic way how amazing God is, what Christ has done for us. All that there is to be thankful to God for.

And it takes him several chapters before he gets to the end of laying that as the core upon which everything else is based. Paul knew that the call to discipleship is not just, well, you've got to do this and you've got to do that and you've got to do this and you've got to do that.

But rather, it begins and indeed ends with knowing the resurrection power of Christ. And once you know that, and only when that has been laid out as the core, then on that core will he set out what Christian lifestyle looks like.

And so, there is this call to walk in the light. You were in darkness, but now you're in the light.

[5 : 12] In fact, he says even more than that. He doesn't even say you were in the darkness. He said, now you have come to Christ, you were darkness, now you are light. So, wake up.

So, what is Paul specifically saying that we've got to wake up from? Well, we need to just go back slightly into Ephesians, into the verses that precede the ones that we've just read.

Let's have it on the screen, because in Ephesians, in verse 3 of this passage, he says, Among you, there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality or of any kind of impurity or of greed.

There are, I dare say, other things that could be highlighted, but those are the two that Paul singles out. Attitudes to sex and to money.

2,000 years later, how much has changed in the Western church? Now, I don't want to spend too long on this, but I think it's worth noting.

[6 : 28] Because this is what Paul is speaking into and saying, you've got to wake up, guys. The first is this. Among you, there must not even be a hint of sexual immorality.

Look, the Bible's quite clear. Sex is a gift from God, the most precious gift. And God wants us to enjoy that which is a special gift in the way that it's intended.

Marriage between one man and one woman. And Paul knew, and his readers knew, that anything that is outside of that doesn't match the standard that God wants for us, for it to be the very best for us to live life fully.

And there's no room for compromise here. As Paul says, let there not be even a hint of anything else. Now, look. We're all broken beings.

We get it wrong. We make mistakes. And as Paul says this, I hear him not as somebody trying to rub people's faces in a sense of a guilt trip.

[7 : 47] He's calling people out. But in order to call people back. And that we need to understand really clearly.

We get it wrong. As human beings, we're broken. We mess up. And when we come back to him, there is always room to be restored. But Paul's message is that you need to make your mind up. Do you want to be restored? Wake up, oh sleeper. There must not be among you the slightest hint of sexual immorality.

The second thing that Paul mentions in that very short sentence there is greed. Greed. Our attitudes towards money.

Which again, money is not in itself a bad thing. It can be a really good thing. But the thing that Paul is calling out is our attitudes to money.

[8 : 47] We've been talking as a church a lot about money recently. About how we need to raise funds. We do. You know, I need to say this really clear and openly.

As a minister, I never have and never will know who gives what. I don't want to know. Because I don't know, it means I can talk about it openly and freely, safe in the knowledge that nobody will ever know that I'm singling anybody out.

Because I'm not. Because I don't know what everyone gives. But I do know as a church that we struggle. I know there is a tremendous amount of generosity within our church.

There is. That's undeniably the case. But I also know that we struggle. To raise funds with a church as big as we are in a town as affluent as this.

That should never be the case. Now I'm able to say this because I don't know who gives what. And I'm not going to say God knows what each of us gives.

[10 : 03] Of course he does. That's not my point. The point is, you will know what you give. And what you don't give.

When we talk about money in church, it's important that we're clear about what we need to raise in order to pay our bills.

But if that's the only thing we emphasize, we really miss the point. Because giving is not so much about fundraising as important as that is as a practical issue.

It's not so much about our relationship. It's not so much about our relationship with God. It's about how we serve with him and how we trust him with what he entrusts with us.

And when Paul writes to the church in Ephesus and says, you know, there are certain things. There must not be a hint of sexual immorality and there must not be a hint of greed either.

[11:08] I don't think so much, although there would be a practical issue in the early churches as much as it is today, that funds need to be raised. Because that's not the most fundamental thing.

The most fundamental thing is our relationship with God and how we trust or don't trust him with what we have and what we don't have.

With the things that make us feel secure and whether we will allow those to get in the way of the dependency that we place on him first and last. When the Holy Spirit works in us, generally speaking, it doesn't all happen in one go.

It's a lifelong process. The theological word for that is sanctification. You come to Jesus, you're accepted as you are completely. Then the work really begins.

Throughout our whole lives, the Holy Spirit is at work in us. Always, always calling us into greater depths of encounter with him. And the amazing thing about being a Christian is it doesn't just stop at the point of when you come to Jesus, whether that's a sudden or a gradual thing.

[12:17] It's a lifelong process of being filled and go on being filled, as Paul writes here in the present continuous tense. Be being filled. Keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit.

As that happens, he makes us and shapes us more and more into the human beings that can live more and more fully as he wants us to. And that's so exciting.

Every day you can know God more fully than you knew him the day before. As his Holy Spirit grows the fruit of the Spirit in you. And as this is a process, so it doesn't all happen at once.

But I notice that there is a pattern time and time again that the Holy Spirit will transform our minds, will transform our hearts, will transform our lifestyle. But the very, very last bit frequently that the Holy Spirit gets to is our bank accounts.

Wake up, says Paul. Rise from the dead. And Christ will shine on you. Because his Holy Spirit wants to, the Holy Spirit of God wants to move in our lives to the deepest parts of us.

[13:35] And it's only when sometimes we have to lay certain things down, certain securities, certain competing things that we would otherwise lay our securities in.

Only when we lay those things down can we make space for God. This summer, Tamara and I did something we'd been longing to do for a long time.

We walked some of the southwest coast path. We didn't do loads of it. We did it over about five days. We're not fitness fanatics. So we didn't do massive, impressive miles at great speed.

And we didn't camp. We went for bed and breakfast. So we're not sort of hiking heroes or anything like that. But it was great fun. But for ages we've been planning for this and getting all this stuff, the kit and everything like that.

We thought we needed. Tamara's parents lived down in Cornwall. So we loaded up a car with all the stuff, including our rucksacks, because we knew that we would still need to take backpacks, even though we were still staying in B&Bs.;

[14:38] And we put it in the car. And then we'll make a decision on exactly what goes in those rucksacks and what doesn't on the actual day that we begin the walk.

So we drove down to Cornwall. We spent the first night at Tamara's parents. And then we decided what we were going to pack into our backpacks. We'd already put quite a few things in. And we realised there was absolutely no way we were going to fit everything that we had thought of in those rucksacks.

Decisions had to be made what was going to come out. You see, the one thing, and it's quite a boring thing actually, but the one thing that we had to make sure that we had, because it was hot, was water.

Particularly if you weren't going to actually be stopping off anywhere during the course of that day where you could get some. So out had to come that extra T-shirt.

Out had to come that extra spare pair of socks. Out had to come this, that and the other to make sure that we had the water that was needed. You can see where this is going.

[15:55] When we take a hard, honest look at our lives, the things that we cling to, there may be things that we have to pull out to travel more lightly in order to make room for a higher level of security on God.

Look, it's not a contractual exchange. It's not like you give this amount to God and then he will give you an awful lot more. It doesn't work like that.

God's a God of grace. But there is this complexity about us as human beings that the more we cling to other things, the less we are able to cling to God.

And we have to make that space for him. And when we do, it can be painful. When we lay down and let go of those things that we would cling to that make us feel safe and secure.

But when we lay those things down, God is faithful. So what might God be saying to you at this time to unpack, to let go of, knowing that the one thing that you do need is his living water, his Holy Spirit.

[17 : 21] And let's be really clear as to just how amazing this is that God does not want to withhold from us. You see, when you follow Jesus, when the Holy Spirit of God comes into your life, you don't just sign up to a set of different convictions, a new philosophy, you know, a code of ethics or a set of doctrines, although those things will be involved.

But that's not principally what it is. When you worship God, it's not just a human activity that's taking place. When you lay things down, when you let go of things and make more space for God, something supernatural takes place.

Can we have 1 Corinthians chapter 6 up on the screen? Paul writes this, Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have received from God?

You see, when you follow Jesus, God's not just with you, although he is. He doesn't just go before you, although he does. He's not just around about you, although he is all of that.

He's in you. The author of the universe takes up residence in your body. Why would we not want to make more space for that?

[19 : 03] But the second piece of scripture that I'd like to share with you comes from Hebrews, which tells us that actually when you worship God, you are surrounded by thousands and thousands of angels and the very presence of God.

In Hebrews it says, in Hebrews 12 it says this, But you have come to Mount Zion to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly.

To the church of the firstborn whose names are written in heaven, you have come to God. Shortly we're going to be in Advent and reading all the Christmas story and we'll talk about angels and when you think about angels, you probably think of nativity plays with tinsel and those kind of wings and, you know, nighties and all those kind of things.

But seriously, if you just saw one angel, you'd probably be quite terrified. It would be a big deal. But here we have Hebrews telling us that every time, every time you engage in worship, you're not just getting religious.

You're not just doing a human thing. Whenever you worship God, you come into the presence of thousands upon thousands of angels.

[20 : 33] And that can be here when you're gathered in church. It can be when you're at home. It can be when you are out on a walk. It can be any time and any place.

But when you confess Jesus is Lord and you come to him in worship, you are surrounded by thousands and thousands of angels and most importantly, the presence of the living God who, as we've just read by his spirit, lives in you.

Isn't that worth making space for? Isn't that worth letting go of other stuff? We can understand just why it is that Paul writes, wake up, rise from the dead and let Christ shine on you.

One last image as we come to pray. I've got a glass of water. In that glass is just water up to that level.

Jane, could you just nudge my hand gently? Nudge my hand. Give it a bit of a knock. A bit more. Just give it a knock my hand. A bit more. What spills out?

[22 : 05] It's not a rhetorical question. What spills out? Water. If it was a cup of tea, what spills out? If it was a cup of coffee, what spills out? If it was a glass of milk, what spills out?

Milk. Whatever fills that vessel will be what spills out when it takes the nudge. Now what fills you? Let's pray.

Lord God, we thank you that you don't just call us to follow you, you don't just call us to believe in you.

You call us and invite us to be filled with your spirit and to go on being filled more and more and more every day.

Lord, we confess to you the ways in which we fill our lives with other things. and because we're all human, every single one of us will be guilty of that.

[23 : 25] And each of us will be probably slightly different as to what it is that we fill our lives with, but Lord, we bring that before you, we lay it before you and we confess it to you now.

Lord, as we confess it to you, firstly, thank you that we can know that we are forgiven.

Secondly, we ask that you would give us the courage to be able to lay things down, whatever those things may be, to let go and to let you, to make space for your Holy Spirit, to wake up and to rise from the dead that you would shine on us.

Holy Spirit, would you fill us and go on filling us that you would shape and form us into the people that you want us to be.

Grow your spiritual fruit, the fruit of the Spirit, in our lives. Make us more Jesus-shaped.

[24 : 58] Lord, and we come before you in worship that we know that you actually dwell in us by your Spirit and that we approach your throne of grace surrounded by thousands and thousands of angels and most importantly, your living presence.

Lord, in this moment, move among us in your Spirit. Go on filling us.

Each day, give us the courage to lay things down, to be filled more with you. Lay things down and to be filled with you.

Lay things down and to be filled with you. Lord, make us enable us to make more room for you.

As Advent approaches, as we begin to think about your promises of your coming, of your return to make all things new, Lord, help us to be ready, ready to meet with you in our daily lives, in whatever situations come our way.

[26 : 38] Fill us with your Spirit. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Thank you.