

Receive the Holy Spirit

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[0 : 00] Thanks, Nate. All right, well, again, for those who might not know me, my name is Matt, and a very warm welcome to you tonight. Let me pray before we hear God's Word.

Let me pray. Dear Lord, please open our ears tonight to help us to hear, and open our hearts to help us to change.

We pray those things in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, for those who go to the 10 a.m. regularly, you'll have heard this story before. But it is a good one, so not to worry. Now, in 1859, there was a tightrope walker.

Now, his name was Jean-Francois Blondin, but he was otherwise known as the Great Blondin.

Now, apparently, tightrope walking back in the 1900s was all the rage.

It was kind of like planking, but if you were caught doing tightrope walking, you were called doing a Blondin. Now, Blondin's claim to fame was that he crossed the 160-foot gap of Niagara Falls.

[1 : 03] Now, he didn't just do it once or twice. He actually did it in as many ways as you can possibly imagine. Apparently, he did it on a unicycle. He did it blindfolded.

One time, he was piggybacking his manager across. Another time, he actually stopped in the middle of the tightrope, set up a burner, and started cooking his dinner. So, you've got some idea.

This guy has a bit of a flair for the dramatic. Now, one of his most famous stunts, though, is one where he was actually going to push a wheelbarrow across the falls.

Now, of course, it wasn't just a wheelbarrow. He was wanting to put a man in that wheelbarrow.

Now, as I said, he was really good at playing the crowds, and thousands and thousands of people would actually come to watch him.

Now, this time in particular, he decided to play up the crowd a little bit. So, he asked them, he asked the crowd, do you believe that I can cross Niagara Falls with the wheelbarrow?

[2 : 03] Now, of course, Andrew, of course we believe. Of course we believe you. You're the great blondin. Now, he didn't stop there, though. He said, do you believe that I can cross this falls with a man in the wheelbarrow?

And they said, of course we believe you. Of course we do. Now, they actually started chanting, we believe, we believe, we believe. Believe. Now, Blondin called for quiet, and then he said this to them.

It's great that you believe in me. Now, who would like to get into the wheelbarrow? Now, I think you know what happened to the crowd there.

There was a stunned silence. And often that is what happens with crowds for us today. The crowds in John's Gospel, when they were looking at Jesus' miracles.

A lot of people followed Jesus around, looking at all of the things that he was doing. And they believed in him because they saw them. But then there were the disciples. And the disciples believed in Jesus, and they gave up their lives to follow him.

[3 : 10] So, I'm going to start this sermon with a question. Now, the answer might seem obvious, but I don't want you to answer just yet. Now, of course, you might have guessed.

The question is, do you believe in Jesus? Now, verse 19 actually sets a scene for us there. So, if you can keep your Bibles open, have a look at that, and have your sermon outlined there next to you as well.

So, verse 19, we can see there it was evening on the same day. It was the same day that Mary saw Jesus. We heard about that last week. Now, it was the first day of the Sabbath.

So, it's three days after Jesus died. And the disciples are there in a locked room. And I think you can probably picture it if you try hard enough. I mean, there the disciples are, a little bit downcast, a little bit scared.

I mean, after all, they're behind locked doors because they are scared, as it says there, for fear of the Jews. And they're scared of them for a very good reason. They've just seen the person that they gave up their lives to follow.

[4 : 19] They've just seen Jesus crucified by the Jews. So, of course, they're scared. They're hiding behind what they feel is safe, behind locked doors.

Then, out of nowhere, though, Jesus is standing in the middle of them. And, of course, they're shocked. Now, Jesus greets them. Peace be with you. Let me just say, it sort of does sound like Jesus was being a bit Anglican there.

But, I joke, I joke. But it just goes to show, though, in, anyway, in verse 20, he shows them his hands and his side. Now, this is one of those details that you only get in John's gospel.

The other synoptics, the other gospels tell us that Jesus' feet and hands were pierced. But they don't mention his side. This is one of the things that John writes.

He actually writes it in 1934. Look it up later. John 19:34. He writes that Jesus' side was pierced. So, the side piercing is actually how the disciples know that this is Jesus.

[5 : 24] It's not just some other guy that was on a cross that has the same wounds. This is actually Jesus. And they believe. They believe that he's been raised from the dead. And you can sort of see it there.

There's almost a lifting of the mood of the passage. They're cheerful. They're rejoicing. And actually, this is a huge climax, not only in John's gospel, but in this particular section of the passage as well.

Right in the middle, you've got the passage we're looking at. On the top of that, you can see there. Look in the passage. You should be able to see there that there's Mary. So, one believer who sees and believes.

And then at the bottom there, you've got Thomas who sees and believes. Now, in the middle here, this is our passage, you've got many disciples, many people seeing and believing.

So, this is something big here. Now, verse 31, if you scan over into the next column, verse 31 tells us what seeing Jesus actually makes them believe.

[6 : 26] It says there, verse 31, that Jesus is the Messiah, the anointed one, the king. That Jesus is the son of God. Now, for all the people who are going to be looking back through John later this week, all three of you, if you look in John 2:18, the Jews basically ask Jesus, what right have you to do this?

What sign are you giving us that we should believe you? And in 2, verse 22, oh, sorry, Jesus actually answers them, I'll destroy the temple and I'll raise it again in three days.

So, this is all the way back in the start of John, in chapter 2. Now, what happens next, though, is that Jesus actually, in verse 22, sorry, John writes in verse 22 that after he was raised from the dead, the disciples remembered and they believed.

So, this is actually John, back in chapter 2, preempting this very moment here that we're talking about. So, these two, this passage acts as a bookend to closing off John's gospel and really being a climax here.

So, this is that sign that they've been looking for all throughout all of John's gospel. It's the sign that Jesus is the Son of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

[7 : 46] And he's made forgiveness for all the wrong stuff that we do, between us and between God, possible. And it's not only the taking away the sins of our sins, and taking that bill, basically, that we've been building up over our whole lifetime, but it's actually the sins of the whole world.

And we need to take a second just to think about how enormous that is. So, that's what the disciples are cheering about when they see Jesus.

That all of the things they've been looking at are true. Now, if you believe, and I mean really believe, in that Jesus, then you actually have something that everyone in this world is looking for.

You have a life. And all the other adjectives that come with life. So, a life of joy, a life of meaning, a life of peace, a life of purpose, eternal life, a spirit-filled life.

Now, let me explain. Verse 21, Jesus says, have a look there, as the Father has sent me, so I send you. Now, God the Father gave His Son, Jesus, the greatest purpose that anyone could ever have on this earth.

[9 : 25] And we all know that verse very well. It's John 3, 16, for God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not die, but have eternal life.

And He did that by living a perfect life, dying, and rising again. And that's what we're seeing here. But the reason that Jesus could do any of that, the reason that Jesus is the Savior of the world, and it's not just an adolescent dream that He's having.

So, you know, like saving the planet, abolishing poverty, leaving your mark on the world, all those sorts of things that you believe when you're young. It's not, it's none of that. Jesus is actually doing it.

And the reason for that is that God the Father gave Him that purpose. God.

Now, that's the omniscient, omnipotent, all-powerful, all-knowing God who created the universe.

[10:34] It's that God. Jesus calls Him Father. Pretty cool. It's that God that has given Jesus His purpose. And it actually says throughout, just have a look there, it's on the outline, but just have a listen.

You can look at the passages later. Jesus' very words, got a reference there, Jesus' very will, His every action, all of Jesus' authority, actually comes from His Father.

And so Jesus is telling His disciples, the people that believe in Him, that as the Father, as that Father, has sent me, so I am sending you.

As that Father has sent me, so I am sending you. So I'm going to ask you a second time.

Do you believe in Jesus? Because if you believe in that Jesus, if you believe that God, the Father, gave that purpose to Jesus Christ, the Son, that God's purpose is lived out through Jesus, and you believe in that Jesus, then you also believe that Jesus' mission is our mission.

[12:01] God's purpose is our purpose. And it's nothing less, it's nothing less than saving lives. and I hope the awe of what that means only grows as we grow older with age and hopefully wisdom.

Now I should explain two things first though. If you do think that what I'm saying there is a little bit over the top, sounds a little bit sappy, have a look. Verse 23. This is what Jesus tells those who believe in Him that they're going to do.

So verse 23. If you forgive the sins of any, they have already been forgiven. Now you'll notice I put the word already in there. Again, look at the handout.

If you're really concerned about it, I can show you an essay. Literally, I have an essay that I can give you that will justify that one word. But, be that or me, I'll read it again.

If you forgive the sins of any, they have already been forgiven. If you retain the sins of any, they have already been retained. Now, here's what that doesn't mean.

[13:13] What that doesn't mean is that we go around saying, forgive you, forgive you, forgive you. Yeah, you're doing that thing I don't really like. I'm not going to forgive you.

That's not what it's about at all. What it is about is that exactly what Jesus meant by as the Father has sent me. So, as the Father has sent Jesus to take away the world's sins, he's already forgiven those sins.

He's already died on the cross, right? So, now, for us, with Jesus' authority that he's given us over sin, he's passing that mission, that same mission, onto us.

So, our words, our will, our actions, that authority under Jesus is to tell people who will believe in him that Jesus has set them free from sin.

That's how Jesus' mission is our mission. Now, the second thing I should explain is the you in, as the Father has sent me, so I send you.

[14:24] Now, this may have been explained before, but it is hugely important for this particular passage. So, this is one of those times when it says you, he actually means you, as in you all.

So, I'll read that again. Verse 23, Jesus said to them, receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven.

If you retain the sins of any, then they are retained. So, for those who believe in Jesus, here, Jesus' mission is to save lives.

And that mission is our mission. And our mission, should we choose to accept it, is that we are sent by the Father's purpose.

Through Jesus' authority over sin, to save the world. That's big. But, how does that work?

[15:38] How does what we're doing here tonight, how does what we do every day work towards that? I mean, it is a huge task. Where do you begin? Is it through doing ministry, going to Bible college, doing an evangelism course?

Preaching, maybe? Let me tell you about my first sermon. Yeah, there's no other way to describe it except that it was terrible, just painful.

I think there is one person here who might have heard it, and they might remember how bad it is, which makes me a little bit embarrassed. But, seriously, it was that bad. I actually stopped and cried in the middle of the sermon.

It was that bad. You don't want to go there. Now, I think that I've learned a little bit since then. I mean, at least I'm not bawling my eyes out right now. So, the temptation for me, though, is to look back at all the sermons, look back at all the things that I've learned, all the things that I've done, and believe that God's given me those abilities, God's gift, if you will, but believing that, these are the things that I do, that I do.

Now, if that's what I'm doing, I always have to keep reminding myself that I'm just going to hit a wall so hard if I keep on going like that.

[17:11] Now, the reason for that is, because if all I'm doing is focusing on what I'm doing, then it becomes what everyone else is doing as well. It's just my identity gets wrapped up in what I'm doing, and that's fine.

You know, that's fine when things are going well. It's fine when you've got a good team with you working. but when things actually get hard, and things always get hard, that's when the discouragement comes, that's when the doubt, fear, that's when those things start to creep in. And as soon as that happens, in whatever way that I do that, I will try and find safety behind a locked door. But, again, all that ends up doing is I close myself off from the world and feel lost, feel scared, feel scarred, and alone.

And if I'm not wrong, I don't think I'm the only person in this room who's felt that way before. going to be going to be going to be going to be going to be done.

Now, if I look back, and all I look back at is what I've done, then I'm forgetting one important thing. It's not about me.

[18:39] It's not about you. It's not about anything that you're doing, that you're going to do, or that you've done before. What it is about is us.

It's about what we are doing together. And even more than that, it's about what the Holy Spirit is doing through all of us.

Now, verse 22 says, Jesus breathed on them, as we said, and said, receive the Holy Spirit. Now, there's a bit of a debate there as to whether the disciples are actually receiving the Holy Spirit there, or whether it's in Acts 2 and Pentecost.

Again, for all three of you who are really interested, this is a symbolic thing that has happened here. That's where the best evidence shows us. And that's actually breathing of new life for the disciples. So it's a symbolic thing. But really functionally for us, it doesn't quite matter so much, because we are on the other side of Pentecost. We, those who believe, have received the Holy Spirit.

[19:47] Now, what is important for us is what we believe. Here. Now.

So I'm going to ask you a third time. Do you believe in Jesus?

Because if you believe in Jesus, you believe that we are empowered by nothing less than God's Holy Spirit.

Spirit. His Spirit that is dwelling in us who believe. Now, I don't know about you, but I just, I think about that, and it just makes the hairs on the back of my neck stand on end.

I get goosebumps. No words can describe that. And that is how Jesus has sent us.

[20:53] See, Jesus' mission is our mission. And he's given us the Holy Spirit to do it. Now, again, what does that mean?

That means that for all those things that we're doing in Jesus' name, so for his sake, that we say we are doing that for his glory, we're actually not doing those things struggling by ourselves alone.

Now, that's what the father of lies would have us believe. And, by the way, if you believe in Jesus, you believe in that evil as well. Now, in all those things that God's Spirit is doing through us, take tonight's service, for instance.

It's easy to think that all we've done is sing a few songs, somebody's read a few things, clicking some buttons at the back, turning a few knobs, handing out flyers, making coffee, saying hi to people. It's easy to think that's all we're doing.

But if what this passage is saying is true, if we're God has given us the Holy Spirit in doing these things, and he's working through all of us, then God is putting something together that is fulfilling his

purpose, and that's saving lives.

[22 : 21] And he's doing that through all of us, not just any one individual, but all of us together. together. That's what we're doing. That's Jesus' purpose, and that is our purpose.

See, friends, I mean, that's only for an hour or two on any given Sunday. Now, brothers and sisters, if we look at all of the things that we do, evangelism, Bible study, discipling, Sunday school, CRE, girls' group, boys' group, talking to people, reading the Bible, every single prayer, every single word of encouragement, every single thing that we do is empowered by the Holy Spirit to fulfill God's purpose.

purpose. And we are working together in that. Now, practically, for those who have been at this for a while, how are you going?

It's tough, isn't it? I know they say it's tough, but you don't actually realize how tough it is until you're in the middle of it.

You don't realize it. I literally can't say what this month has been like.

[24 : 00] I just can't. Because then I'll just be crying in a heap. I literally can't say it. But it's exactly in those sort of times that we remember that it's not by our strength and we are not by ourselves.

And that's why I can still stand up here and I can still say that we can accomplish all things through him who gives us strength.

And there may be more disappointments. I can guarantee there will be more disappointments. But we keep persevering. We keep molding ourselves. And we keep in step with the Spirit.

That's what we do. And the reason that we do that, it becomes tempting to invest time into all those other projects that we have. And it's tempting because all those other projects actually seem like they're going somewhere.

But what we need to remember is that there is no other mission, no other task, no other project that could be more worthwhile than Jesus' mission.

[25 : 22] And that's why we keep investing. Rain, hail, or shine. Now practically, for those of us who are breaking new ground, so that can be anything from talking to someone about Jesus for the very first time to maybe serving in a new way or taking on a new spiritual discipline, maybe even thinking about full-time ministry.

Now I'm not looking at anyone in particular, and I can't because, well, there's at least seven or eight people, including myself, who are jumping into that boat. Now, what we remember when we're facing those things and there's always that doubt.

You might not be able to do it because you don't know. What we remember is that God has given us his spirit.

God has given us his spirit. And he's working in us in the same way that he's working in everyone else. And here's the thing that I always keep close to my heart.

There is not a single thing that God has set out to do, not a single thing in all of history that God has set out to do that he has not done.

[26 : 48] Now, I was asking around, trying to find kind of encouraging stories of how you as a congregation feel encouraged. So I asked my Bible study, ask Facebook. And I did get some good answers.

And actually, they have shaped the sermon, believe me. And so thank you for those. One of the ones that did stick out to me in particular, though, was saying that if they haven't done something before and they do have doubt, it sometimes helps when they know that someone believes in them enough that they've given them that task.

So maybe a colleague or a leader or a friend, they believe in them. When someone believes in you, then, you know, again, you feel like you're not alone.

And at least someone else in this world thinks you might be able to. So that's kind of one of those good comforting feelings. Now, with God, spirit is the ultimate sign.

The ultimate sign. Now, it's not so much that God believes in us. It doesn't really quite work that way. Because God doesn't need to believe.

[27 : 56] God, God knows, right? So it's even better than someone believing in you. It's that God knows that we are going to be doing his mission.

So when you're doing whatever it is that you're stepping into, whatever it is you're doing, the thing to believe, and that's that step of faith, is faith in knowing that God has given you his spirit to do his work.

And that we're doing this thing together. Now, not everything, not everyone should be a preacher or a teacher or not everyone should be able to do everything. But what it is, is, is that if we are doing our part, and we are continuously trusting in God with the things that he has given us to do, then together, one way or another, God's intended purpose, Jesus' mission, our mission, will never fail. And as I said, that mission is nothing less than saving the lives of the people that you and I know. Nothing less. Now, if you haven't met Jesus, if you haven't met Jesus, and what I've been saying tonight has been interesting, but it hasn't made all that much sense.

[29 : 35] That might be the case. Now, if hopefully the one thing does make sense, though, and that's that God has a purpose for you.

And God has done something about all of the wrong things that have gone terribly pear-shaped in this world. Now, if you want to believe in that, if you want to believe, just find out more. Talk to someone who's been up the front talk to Mark. There'll be people up here praying at the end as well. Talk to someone about it. And find out.

Don't let that opportunity pass, because you're missing out on the life. Now, for all of us, for young, for old, I mean, again, us.

For all of us, don't worry, I'm not going to ask you to jump into a wheelbarrow, but I do actually want you to jump on a bandwagon.

[30 : 38] Now, what I mean by that is there's an evangelism course, and I won't spoil it, but they're going to be doing an ad for it later, so get ready for that. You can look forward to it.

But basically, it's on Monday through to Thursday, running for three weeks. And all you have to do, all we have to do, is show up on just one of those nights on week one, and one of those nights on week two, and one of those nights on week three.

That's all. That's all we have to do. So, whatever you usually do, whatever it is that takes up your other nights, just find one night free.

If you don't go to a growth group, even more reason to come. But come, come and find out how we can talk to our friends better about Jesus.

And hopefully you have in mind someone that you've always wanted to talk to about Jesus, but you just never quite knew how. Come and find out. I know that there is something in there that all of us, again, young or old, experienced or inexperienced.

[31 : 47] There is something in there that all of us can use. Now, the very last thing, very last thing, for those of us who believe, for those of us who believe that Jesus died for us, for those of us who believe that God has sent his, God the Father has sent his son, and so he sends us.

So for those of us who believe in that, remember, Jesus' mission is our mission.

And he has given us his Holy Spirit to do it. Let's pray. God, we thank you for giving us purpose in life.

We thank you for giving us your spirit to enable us to do any of these things. Lord, help us to be able to rejoice in that, to be able to know that you are with us and that we are all in this together, all in your mission to save lives.

Lord, help us to remember this. And Lord, we thank you so much for all of these things. And we thank you that you have made this day. And it is a happy day. Because we are forever changed, and that is for your glory.

[33 : 13] So Lord, we pray these things by your Holy Spirit. Amen. Now, by the Holy Spirit, through Jesus' blood, for the Father's glory, let's sing the next song.