

God's Spirit works God's will

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Preacher: Tyler Horton

[0 : 00] When I first set off for college, I was living in central British Columbia, so closer to Texas than to here. And I was going to college in Saskatchewan, also closer to Texas than it is to here.

And I was driving with my dad in this old Toyota 4Runner, which not all of you will know what that is, but they're a remarkable vehicle, except ours was broken, significantly broken in a lot of ways. The locks had been busted off when someone had broken into the car, mistakenly thinking it would hold something valuable. And so my dad decided, this happened a number of times, to stop replacing the locks.

So we just never left anything in it. To get in and out of the car, you'd stick your finger in a hole in the door and pull up the lever to get in and out. It was a great car. One of the things that didn't work on it was the gas gauge.

And so what we would do, we knew a tank of gas could do something like 650 to 700 kilometers. And so we would watch the trip-o-meter, which you could reset. So you fill up with gas, reset the odometer, the one that measures trips, and then count up.

[1 : 02] And when you get to 600, you go fill up. Something like that. So we're driving from northern British Columbia, sort of southeast into the Rocky Mountains. And as soon as you get to a city called Jasper, you turn right and head south on a new highway, which is called the Icefields Parkway.

And when you get on that highway, there's a big sign that says, 232 kilometers until next gas, or next petrol, next fuel. Which is remarkable. I want to pause to point out that if you drove 232 kilometers from where you're standing right now, in half the compass, you'd be in the ocean. In Canada, that's how far we keep our petrol stations apart, right? So we looked down at the trip-o-meter. There was already over 400 kilometers that we'd gone on that tank.

My dad was driving. We both looked at the sign. We both looked at the odometer. We both looked at each other, and like any self-respecting father, he said, we can make it.

So, off we went. And again, it's not straight roads, neither is it flat roads. It is the Rocky Mountains, and it's called the Icefields Parkway. So we were going up and down and winding around, watching the kilometers tick and tick away.

[2 : 16] We get into the second hour, and we're going along, and suddenly you sort of, because like a cylinder just misses, just one, right? They're not quite all firing, and so you just feel every now and then a little lurch as the engine sort of slurps like a straw at the bottom of a cup, going, I'm not sure this is going to work.

We're both getting a little more nervous and a little more nervous. It starts happening more. The engine sputters. But we come around a corner. I actually looked it up on Google Maps, and you really can just barely see it.

It's just forest. But you do come around this corner, and you can see the big sign for the petrol station. And as soon as we both look up and see it and feel that relief, the engine sees it and feels relief and says, OK, we're done, and just stops.

So we're coasting toward the gas station. We're going to have to turn left into it. If a car is coming toward us, we're toast, because we need to push the brakes. Luckily, there's no cars. We think we're going to make it. We're going to make it.

We're both saying, I think we're going to make it, coasting along. And then we see the gas station, and it's not like a level entrance. It's like highway, gas station.

[3 : 26] There's no cars coming toward us. We're coasting in. My dad is fighting the lack of power steering at this point. We turn up. We get up. The back wheels hit the top of the hill of the gas station, and we die right there.

It was perfect. I got out and gave a little push from the top of the hill, and we rolled down to one of the pumps so that we could actually fill up. So as all self-respecting dads know, he was right, and we absolutely made it.

It raises the question, how do we know enough? How do we know if we have enough to make it through? More specifically, as a Christian, as someone who is following Christ, because as we said last week, God's ways are not our ways.

And the calls that God places on our life are difficult and feel and seem unnatural to us in our current state. It's difficult. And we know how often we fall short of this as well.

That was part of the whole point last week, was to recognize in what ways are we turning from God's to our own, because we have a propensity. We're inclined away from God's ways and to our own. So how do we know we're going to make it through?

[4 : 41] How do we know we're going to keep being able to humble ourselves, to take up our cross, to bless those who persecute us or curse us? How do we know we're going to have enough to keep repenting, to keep opening our heart and saying, I did it again, Lord, and I failed again.

And to lay bare before him the fact that we have fallen short in his holiness. How do we know we've got enough to make it through, to answer the call that God places on our lives?

Let's look then at Saul and his interactions with the Spirit, because the way that we know we have enough to make it through God's call is simply because God has given us his Spirit.

God's Spirit works God's will. Remember from last week, Israel had asked their true king for a new king. And as we go through the first part of this section, God is giving them one.

God orchestrates a meeting between Samuel, who's a prophet, priest, judge type figure, and a meeting between Samuel and Saul, who is going to be the first king, so that they can move towards Saul becoming the king.

[5 : 51] Saul's family, as you heard in the reading, had a big herd of donkeys. And they had been left out to graze and they weren't sure where they were. And so Saul goes out to go find the donkeys.

God orchestrates this meeting again between Saul and Samuel. Because Saul then is going to look for a seer, the prophet, to tell them where the donkeys are.

And when Saul meets Samuel, Samuel says to him, not just, oh, I know where the donkeys are. He says, you, Saul, you have a significant role to play.

Saul approached Samuel in the gateway and asked, would you please tell me where the seer's house is? I am the seer, Samuel replied. Go up ahead of me to the high place, for today you are to eat with me.

And in the morning I'll send you on your way and will tell you all that is in your heart. As for the donkeys you lost three days ago, do not worry about them, they've been found. And to whom is all the desire of Israel turned, if not to you and your whole family line?

[6 : 55] Saul answered, but am I not a Benjaminite from the smallest tribe of Israel and is not my clan the least of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why do you say such a thing to me?

Samuel brought Saul and his servant into the hall and seated them at the head of those who were invited, about 30 in number. So there's this meeting God has orchestrated. Samuel says to Saul, you're actually going to be a pretty big deal.

And Saul doesn't say, yeah, I know. I know. Saul says, I'm not sure you've got the right guy. I come from not just the smallest tribe, but the smallest family of the smallest tribe.

This doesn't sound like it's a thing for me. But God has told Samuel it is. And so Samuel persists and sets him at the head of the table. Again, it sounds though that Saul is not too sure about this. The story carries on through the passage that we already heard read. Samuel anoints Saul to be the king privately. But then later on in chapter 10, starting in verse 17, if you want to flip over there, Samuel gathers the tribes to publicly declare Saul is the first king.

[8 : 05] First Samuel 10, 17. And Saul summoned the people of Israel to the Lord at Mizpah and said to them, this is what the Lord, the God of Israel says. I brought you up out of Egypt and I delivered you from the power of Egypt and all the kingdoms that oppressed you.

But you've now rejected your God who saves you out of all your disasters and calamities. And you've said, no, appoint a king for us. So now present yourselves before the Lord by your tribes and clans.

And then Samuel starts going through them, choosing, well, which tribe is the king going to come from? And Benjamin is chosen. No surprise of us to those who read chapter nine. And then it goes through all the families within the tribe of Benjamin and the family of Saul is chosen.

No surprise to us who already know what's going on. And then from within Saul's family, Saul is chosen. They're doing this publicly to show that this is God's choice for their king.

Saul has already been told by Samuel, God has chosen you to be the king over this people. Now in a public ceremony, again, they are, the Lord is telling them this tribe out of all the others, this family out of all the others, this man out of all the others.

[9 : 17] And we get down to show that it's Saul being chosen. God has clearly demonstrated, but Saul seems not to be convinced. Verse 20 of chapter 10.

When Samuel had all Israel come forward by tribes, the tribe of Benjamin was taken by Lot. Then he brought forward the tribe of Benjamin, clan by clan, and Matri's clan was taken.

Finally, Saul, son of Kish, was taken. But when they looked for him, he was not to be found. So they inquired further of the Lord, has the man come up here?

And the Lord said, yes, he has hidden himself among the supplies. They ran and brought him out. And as he stood among the people, he was a head taller than any of the others.

Samuel said to all the people, do you see the man the Lord has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people. And the people shouted, long live the king. Samuel explained to the people the rights and duties of kingship.

[10 : 15] He wrote them down on a scroll and deposited it before the Lord. And then Samuel dismissed the people to go to their own homes. When Samuel first encounters Saul, Saul says, I don't know that you've got the right guy.

When they do this big public ceremony to show God has chosen Saul, Saul says, not only am I not the right guy, I'm in the wrong place. And so he goes and hides among the baggage, among the supplies.

Saul's not sure this is the way this is supposed to go. He is not presenting a confident face. He is not presenting himself as someone who believes what God has said.

And as someone who is prepared to lead the people of Israel. And he's not alone. In verse 26 and 27, we find out other people are also unsure. Saul went to his home in Gibeah, accompanied by valiant men whose hearts God had touched.

But some scoundrel said, how can this fellow save us? They despised him and brought him no gifts, but Saul kept silence. So they've got a king. Samuel knows that God has done this.

[11 : 22] The people shout, long live the king. But not everyone is sure, including, importantly, Saul himself. Suddenly, though, when we turn over to chapter 11, we get a very, very different story.

There's an Israelite city called Jabesh Gilead, which is under real threat from a group called the Ammonites. Chapter 11, verse 2. Nahash the Ammonite replied, I will make a treaty with you, you people of Jabesh Gilead, only on the condition that I gouge out the right eye of every one of you and so bring disgrace on all Israel.

He had surrounded the town and said, I'm taking over. They said, can we make a treaty? And he said, well, of course we can make a treaty. We'll have peace after I gouge out the right eye of every person in the city.

The elders of Jabesh said to him, give us seven days so we can send messengers throughout Israel. If no one comes to rescue us, we will surrender to you. Now that's remarkable.

Because from a military standpoint, if you're the Ammonites, do you want to give the people you're besieging seven days to go look for help? Probably not. It looks like they were so certain that Israel was weak and scattered and not a threat.

[12 : 36] And they said, yeah, sure, take seven days and see how it goes for you. Things are not looking very good. At this point, what do we expect from Saul? We have an Israelite city under threat from an enemy who says, yeah, this is going to be fine.

Find everyone you can in seven days and we'll see how that goes. And what we know of Saul is, I'm the smallest guy from the smallest family and the smallest tribe. This isn't me.

We have Saul who said, God is setting me up as king. I'm hiding in the baggage so it doesn't happen. What do we expect from Saul at this point? Probably nothing, right?

Probably dig a hole in your house and climb into it and wait till it all blows over. And that's absolutely not what happens. Verse six of first Samuel chapter 11.

When Saul heard their words, the words of the messengers from Jabesh Gilead, the spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon him and he burned with anger. He took a pair of oxen, cut them in pieces and sent the pieces by messengers throughout Israel, proclaiming, this is what will be done to the oxen of anyone who does not follow Saul and Samuel.

[13:48] Then the terror of the Lord fell on the people and they came out together as one. When Saul mustered them at Bezek, the men of Israel numbered 300,000 and those of Judah 30,000.

They told the messengers who had come say to the men of Jabesh Gilead, by the time the sun is hot tomorrow, you will be rescued. When the messengers went and reported this to the men of Jabesh, they were elated.

They said to the Ammonites, tomorrow we will surrender to you and you can do to us whatever you like. The next day, Saul separated his men into three divisions during the last watch of the night.

They broke into the camp of the Ammonites and slaughtered them until the heat of the day. Those who survived were scattered so that no two of them were left together. The people then said to Samuel, who was it that asked, shall Saul reign over us?

Turn these men over to us that we may put them to death. But Saul said, no one will be put to death today. For this day, the Lord has rescued Israel. Samuel said to the people, come, let us go to Gilgal and there renew the kingship.

[14:51] So all the people went to Gilgal and made Saul king in the presence of the Lord. There they sacrificed fellowship offerings before the Lord and Saul and all the Israelites held a great celebration.

What in the world happened? You've got this man cowering and hiding and now suddenly you have this man leading, drawing all the people together at once, taking charge, coming up with strategy, and winning a glorious victory for the people of God.

The change is at the start of the passage I just read in verse 6. When Saul heard their words, the Spirit of God came powerfully upon him. That's what made the difference.

As Christians, we talk about God as Trinity, as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, or the Spirit of God. It's difficult to describe exactly how this works, but what we see in Scripture is pretty clearly one God in three persons.

We don't really get a clear view of the Son, which is Jesus, until the New Testament, but the Spirit of God appears all throughout the Old Testament. And where the Spirit of God appears, something extraordinary is definitely going to happen.

[16:10] Joseph, the son of Jacob, when he was in Egypt, was able to interpret dreams and had all kinds of great wisdom. And people said, this is a man in whom lies the Spirit of God.

Moses, who is the great leader of Israel, who brought them up out of Egypt and out in toward the Promised Land, is an extraordinary leader, we find, because God has given his Spirit to him.

In the book of Judges, we find a man named Gideon, upon whom the Spirit of the Lord came, and he is able to lead the people of Israel to victory. So what's going on with Saul?

How does he go from a man cowering to a true king leading his people? There's no self-help. He didn't read, you know, ten tips on good kingship or military strategy. The Spirit of the Lord came upon him.

And that's what made all the difference. This is also what the anointing was about. In the scripture reading where it said that Samuel anointed Saul with oil, that oil is a picture of the Spirit of God coming upon him and anointing him so that he can be the king.

[17:20] A man who hides from his calling becomes a powerful leader because the Spirit of God comes upon him. Where the Spirit of God appears, we know that something extraordinary is going to happen, and we know it from the first page.

In Genesis chapter 1 and verse 1, the earth is formless and void, but the Spirit of God is hovering over the waters. And then creation begins.

God's Spirit works God's will. How do we know we'll have enough to make it through? To do what God calls us to do in putting to death the deeds of the flesh, putting to death sin, and putting on righteousness?

How do we know we'll have enough? Because God has given us his Spirit. How do we know we'll be able to be witnesses, to know what to say, to have courage, to carry on, to have the strength, to take the good news of Jesus to those who most need it when it's awkward and difficult and controversial?

It is because God has given us his Spirit. Throughout the Old Testament, we see the Spirit of God come upon people, upon prophets, and they do extraordinary things.

[18 : 31] But you also get promises that things are going to change. For example, in Ezekiel 36, God says, God says, I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean.

I will cleanse you from all your impurities and all your idols. I will give you a new heart and I will put a new spirit in you. I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. God's ways are not our ways.

Part of what we mean by that is we constantly seem to choose against God's ways. The problem is our hearts. The problem is that we are born with this inclination away from God, that we love darkness rather than light.

And so God here through Ezekiel gives this promise, I'm going to fix the problem. And the problem is your heart. The problem is your spirit. I will renew you and I will give my spirit to you.

[19 : 35] He's saying it's going to change. They knew the Spirit of God came upon individuals like Ezekiel so they could prophesy. Came upon individuals like David so he could be king.

Like Gideon so he could be judge. Like Saul so he could have won this great victory. And God is saying the Spirit will come upon all of you and he will move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

We move from there to the New Testament and find astonishing things happening. Mary is told the Holy Spirit will come upon you and you will conceive. And Jesus is born.

John the Baptist prepares the way for Jesus saying I baptize with water. One who comes after me baptizes with the Spirit. Jesus starts his ministry by the Spirit of God descending from heaven visibly like a dove.

Jesus begins his ministry in Luke 4. It says full of the Spirit Jesus left the Jordan being led by the Spirit. And when he stands in the synagogue to read scripture he says the Spirit of the Lord is upon me.

[20 : 46] Because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. Freedom and sight to set the oppressed free to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. And after Jesus is crucified rises from the dead and is ascending to heaven.

An angel says you the disciples will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be witnesses. Remember which part of history we live in.

We live in the part of history where God has poured out his Spirit on all of those who are in Christ. Shortly after Jesus ascends on the day of Pentecost a big group of Jesus' followers is praying and it said all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit.

Not one leader like Saul. It doesn't say and Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit. Not just a select group like the group of prophets that Saul joined for a little while. Not just the disciples are full of the Holy Spirit.

This is a big crowd praying all together. They're not all disciples the twelve disciples of Jesus. They're not all Peter. They're just a group of people who are followers of Jesus and the Spirit of God came upon all of them.

[22 : 01] And Acts tells of amazing things and powerful witness and devotion that they have because they were filled with the Holy Spirit. How do you know if you have enough to make it through?

To put off sin. To put on righteousness. To break the habits and chains that hold you entangled to sin and darkness.

To move into the things that God is calling you to do that are difficult. We know we have enough because God has given us. All of us. Every single one of us who are in Christ.

His Holy Spirit. While we would otherwise be left cowering in the baggage. We can now step out. This is how it worked. When you believed. When you believed.

You were marked in Christ with a seal. Which is the promised Holy Spirit. Who is a deposit that guarantees your inheritance.

[22 : 59] Until the redemption of those who are God's possession. That's you. When you believed. You were marked with the promised Holy Spirit.

As a deposit. Guaranteeing your inheritance. Until the redemption of those who are God's possession. That's you. Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Because. Through Christ Jesus. The law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free. Free from the law of sin and death. What the law was powerless to do.

What Ezekiel said. You need a new heart and a new spirit. The law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh. By our own heart and our own spirit.

God did by sending his own son. Conceived of the Holy Spirit. Filled by the Holy Spirit. Led by the Holy Spirit. In order that the righteous requirement of the law.

[24 : 02] Might be fully met in us. As he gives us his spirit. That is. You. Jesus condemned sin in the flesh. So that the righteous requirement of the law.

Might be fully met in us. This is in Romans chapter 8. And what's astonishing to remember. Paul has never met these people in his life. He's not yet been to Rome.

In the letter of Romans. He says. I'd sure like to come and see you. He's never even met these people. But he knows. If they are in Christ. This is true of them. That God has fixed the problem by giving them of his spirit.

Now. You may have picked up a problem in all of this. Or an issue. Because Saul is given the spirit of God. And Saul doesn't make it through.

This victory that we see him win in chapter 11. 11. Is followed by misery. And horrific decisions.

With horrific consequences. There's two things that we need to recognize.

[25 : 06] And the first is this. God's gift of the spirit to Christians. Is different. Than God's gift of the spirit to Saul. What we have in Christ. Is different than what Saul got.

In the Old Testament. Before Christ. God gives the spirit. For a specific task. Or to give a specific capacity. To rule. Or lead. Or to create. And the gift of the spirit.

Is often temporary. Simply for that purpose alone. If you keep reading in first Samuel. Near the start of chapter 16. The spirit of God leaves Saul. And the spirit of God comes upon David.

Who is going to be a better king. The promises like the one we saw in Ezekiel. Say things are going to be different. So recognize this. What you have is different.

Than what Saul had. And what you have is more. Than what Saul had. God by the spirit. Isn't equipping you to be king of anything. Or queen of anything.

[26 : 06] He is equipping you to fulfill his law. To push back against our own flesh. And live up to the commands. And call that he places on our lives. So the first thing.

Recognize God's gift of the spirit. To Christians is different. And the second thing. Recognize that the way God gives the spirit. Leaves us room to choose things. Saul had the spirit of God come upon him.

It doesn't explain what went wrong in these chapters. But something went wrong in Saul. And somehow it looks like he rejected this. Paul in Galatians commands us to walk by the spirit.

By the spirit. If you need to be told to walk by the spirit. That means it's not going to happen automatically. Or mechanically. Right? God does not promise us perfection by the spirit.

But we are absolutely promised power to live out his calling. God works his will by his spirit. And we have been given his spirit.

[27 : 11] And we have been given his spirit. I want you to imagine. You're standing on the street. Somebody walks up to you and hands you a rope. And says, I need you to tie this up so he won't walk away. And you look over to see what he is.

And it's an elephant. It is a huge, enormous elephant. What do you tie an elephant to? To keep it from walking away? Your wrist?

A lamppost? Your neighbor's car? Like what are you going to tie an elephant to? That it's not going to be able to walk away from? I've been told.

I have no idea if this is true. But the picture is just too perfect. But what I've been told is. People who keep elephants. From the time they're very young. Just tie them to a stake in the ground.

A big stake. A big stake. But then you tie the rope to the stake. And the small elephant pulls and realizes it can't get away. And so that these elephants grow up thinking. If I'm tied to the stake. I'm not going anywhere.

[28 : 07] I've tried that. You know. If they only knew. The question for us is. Are you living tied to things. That don't actually have the power to hold you back?

Are you living as though. The things that hold you. Can actually hold you. Against the power of God's Holy Spirit. Among you. Levels and layers of righteousness.

That you know you're called to. Levels of witness and sacrifice. That God has placed before you.
The question for us is. Do you know who you are in Christ?
You are a six ton elephant. I say that with all due respect. In Christ you are a six ton elephant. God
by his spirit. Dwells within you.
And so the call on our lives. Do not get drunk with wine. But be filled with the Holy Spirit.