

The Holy Spirit & Assurance

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[0 : 00] Come and talk to us. Come and talk to us. The second reading tonight is from Matthew chapter 3. It starts at Matthew chapter 3 verse 13 until chapter 4 verse 11.

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him saying, I need to be baptized by you and do you come to me? But Jesus answered him, let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness. And then he consented. And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water. And behold, the heavens were opened to him. And he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him. And behold, a voice from heaven said, this is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. And the tempter came to him and said to him, if you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.

[1 : 09] But he answered, it is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, if you are the Son of God, throw yourself down.

For it is written, he will command his angels concerning you. And on their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone. Jesus said to him, again it is written, you shall not put the Lord your God to the test.

Again the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, all these I will give you if you will fall down and worship me.

Then Jesus said to him, be gone, Satan, for it is written, you shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve. Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

This is the word of the Lord. Amen. You want to turn that one off?

[2 : 19] Thanks. Hi everybody. Well done. Keep your service sheets open to the Romans reading in particular. Although we'll glance at the other one.

And we'll get in it there. Let's pray together. Father, we come to you now as a gathering of people who you, through Jesus, have told us to call you Father.

And it's a remarkable thing that you would instruct us to pray to you using that word, using the word Father. Father, but we do. It's bold.

It's maybe even bizarre when we think about it. But you have commanded that we call you Father. And we rejoice in that. And now we come to you Father, and we ask that you would open our ears and make our ears attentive, our hearts attentive to you as your children.

We ask this through your only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Amen. Well, friends, over the past five weeks, we have been looking at the Holy Spirit.

[3 : 42] And in particular, we've been looking at how the Holy Spirit relates to the Christian life. How is it that the Holy Spirit, you know, what difference does the Holy Spirit make in our lives?

How does the Holy Spirit come and empower us as Christians? How does the Holy Spirit come and change our lives? How does the Holy Spirit make the difference that he does?

And last week, we talked about the Holy Spirit and holiness. The Holy Spirit and walking out the Christian life in a holy manner.

Now, that sermon caused some problems for some folks. I know because you talked to me. And if you remember what we talked about last week, we said that we were looking at Galatians chapter 5.

And we talked about how, as humans, our hearts are programmed kind of naturally. We have a default settings. And our default settings in our heart is to prefer ourselves and to prefer ourselves over and against God and to prefer ourselves over and against other people.

[4 : 53] We were looking, like I said, in Galatians 5. And we said that Paul calls that the flesh. When Paul talks about the flesh, he's not talking about human bodies.

He's talking about that inward orientation that all of us have to prefer ourselves to be very, very self-centered rather than God-oriented and oriented towards loving other people.

And what happens, we said last week, is that fleshly part of us, that self-preferring part of us, leads us to self-destructive behavior, sin, stuff like that.

But ultimately, if left unchecked, it will inevitably lead us away from God for an eternity. And so what we talked about, what Paul showed us, is that the Holy Spirit has an absolute commitment to killing the flesh.

The Holy Spirit is on about killing the flesh in us. The words that he uses in Galatians 5 are, those who are in Christ have crucified the flesh. And the implication is that that happens through the Holy Spirit.

[5 : 59] Now, the problem is, the problem that some of you came to me with afterwards, let me see if I can articulate it properly.

A lot of us have walked with Jesus for a long time. And we've walked with Jesus for a long time, but the flesh isn't dead yet.

Some of you came to me and pointed out how you are still locked in battle with the flesh.

You're still locked in a kind of mortal combat with the flesh. And you would think, you would think that the Holy Spirit would have gotten a job done by now. You would have thought that the Holy Spirit would have it dead.

You would think that the longer you walk with Jesus, the less flesh you would have, the easier it would be to kill. That, you know, after a while it just can be like spiritual retirement, everything gets easy.

[7 : 05] But what you found, what you found is that so often it seems to be the opposite. The longer you're with Jesus, the more you see how much flesh still has to die. And that can become terribly discouraging.

And it can become terribly, terribly frightening to us. To the point that some of us actually begin to despair of whether or not we are true children of God at all.

We begin to question our identity in Christ. We begin to wonder, am I an imposter? Have I been filled with the Spirit at all? Is there any true new life in me?

Or am I just putting on? Now tonight, we're talking about the Holy Spirit and assurance. And we're talking about how the Holy Spirit has a unique ministry of coming into us and giving us a deep, profound, rigorous sense of God's fatherly affection in such a way that we know ourselves to be the children of God.

But here's what I want to show you. The path to assurance is a path that always runs through the battle. The Holy Spirit leads us into the battle for holiness.

[8 : 26] And then he leads us through the battle for holiness. And we come out the other end and actually, better, in the middle of the battle for holiness, the Spirit also breaks in on us and gives us an inward sense of God's fatherly affection.

And that's what fuels us in the battle. Okay. So I want to look first at the battle, how the Holy Spirit leads us into the battle for holiness. And then secondly, I want to look at how the Spirit gives us that inward sense, that sweet communion sense of God's fatherly affection.

Okay. We start with the battle. Look at the Romans reading. Chapter 1. Sorry. Chapter 1? No. Chapter 8. It's the first reading, though. And I want you to zero in right on verse 14.

This is going to speak directly to some of you who are discouraged because you're constantly battling with sin. Look at verse 14. For all, note the phrase, all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

Now, I want you to focus on that phrase, led by the Spirit. I don't know what comes to your mind when you think about being Spirit-led. But oftentimes, it seems to me that when we hear the phrase, led by the Spirit or Spirit-led, we think of how the Spirit guides us in decision-making.

[9 : 48] I don't know if that's what you think of. That's what a lot of people think of. So we think of the Spirit leading us into a particular career or to marry a particular person or something like that.

That's not what this phrase is about. This phrase, Paul's talking about something very different. Paul is talking about how the Holy Spirit leads us. He leads God's children into just a constant, unrelenting, unmitigated war against the flesh.

It's what we were talking about last week. I say that because of verse 13, the context. Just the verse before it. Verse 13. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die.

But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. In verse 14. For all who are thus led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

Okay, I want you to see what he's saying here. This is very, very important. Verse 14 is telling us that your constant battling against the flesh, your constant battle against sin and the devil, is actually an indication that you really are a child of God.

[11:02] All who are led by the Spirit into battle, those are the ones that are actually the children of God. Let me put it a little different way.

One of the indicators that you're actually full of the Holy Spirit is that you are outraged by your sin. You want the flesh to be gone.

And you feel the difficulty and the constant battle with the flesh. Now, it's important to kind of belabor this point a little bit because it's an often neglected aspect of Christian experience. Oftentimes, a lot of us, I know I think this way a lot of the times when I'm not thinking very biblically, I begin to think that if I'm really filled with the Spirit, if I'm really walking in the power of the Holy Spirit, then life will be happy, happy, joy, joy, charging down the lane of Christian victory all the time. That's not what the Bible teaches. The Holy Spirit leads us directly into battle. And there are times in which the battle, we experience the battle to be so intense, so hard, so much full of blood and sweat and tears that we can even begin to question whether or not we're on God's team at all.

[12:33] Let me read you from a journal. This comes from a guy called David Brainerd. David Brainerd is one of my spiritual heroes.

He's from the 18th century. He was a missionary to the First Nations, to some First Nations out east. And my guess is that you've probably never heard of him, but he was, historically, he's one of the most influential missionaries of all time.

And he suffered greatly. But everybody who knew him, the reason he was so influential is that everybody agreed that this guy, of all people, is eminently holy.

He's full of the Holy Spirit. He was just a remarkable man. But he struggled profoundly, and he struggled with spiritual depression. Let me read you one of his journal articles, or entries.

This is from Thursday, August 12, 1742. This morning and last night, I was exercised with sore inward trials.

[13:36] I had no power to pray, but I seemed shut out from God. I had, in great measure, lost my hopes for ministry and for evangelism.

I saw so much of my hellish vileness that I appeared worse to myself than any devil. I wondered that God would even let me live, and I wondered that people did not stone me rather than listen to me preach.

That guy's depressed. And some of you can identify with him. But the problem with David Brainerd at that day, and this is one entry, you read his journal and there's tons of them.

He really struggled with this. The problem is not that this man is unspiritual. The reality is that it was the Holy Spirit's work in his life that was actually driving him to confront various issues in his life.

And in the experience of that confrontation, there are great trials. And in the midst of that, Satan came to him and began to question whether or not he was really even a child of God.

[14:59] Began to question his identity before God. You can see the same kind of pattern in Jesus' temptation. This is the second reading. We're not going to go through it in detail, but if you remember what Laura just read for us, Jesus gets baptized, right?

Wonderful moment. God speaks from heaven. Jesus hears God's word. Jesus receives the Holy Spirit in a new kind of power. He gets up in chapter 4, verse 1.

Who leads him into the desert? Who leads him into battle? It's the Holy Spirit. Leads him directly into battle with Satan. And if you read through the three temptations, two of the three temptations include Satan coming to Jesus and questioning his identity before God.

If you're really the Son of God. If you're really the Son of God. Prove it. Because if Satan can undermine Jesus' faith in God.

If Satan can undermine Jesus' identity as God's Son. Then it will be just a moment of time before Jesus falls. And Satan's temptations are often that way.

[16:16] He comes to us. And he tempts us. And he buffets us. And he attacks us. And sometimes the battle gets so fierce that we're not even sure who we are.

Now if that's you, I want you to know that that in and of itself is not an indication that you are, that you're not a child of God.

The Holy Spirit leads us directly into battle. But here's the thing. Here's the critical moment. The Holy Spirit does not leave us in the battle. He leads us into the battle. And sometimes the fray is remarkably intense.

But there, that is precisely the place where the Holy Spirit brings to us that profound sense of God's fatherly affection. Let me show you what I mean.

Look at Romans. Romans 8, verse 15. Paul says, For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption as sons by whom we cry, Abba, Father.

[17:21] Father, I love this verse. I want you to look at it and look at how it works. He mentions two spirits. There's a spirit that drives us to fear and slavery and condemnation, but that is not the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit, right in the midst of our battle for holiness, drives us to look away from our preoccupation with ourself and our failures and how terrible we are and all that kind of stuff.

The Holy Spirit draws our attention away from ourselves and drives us to cling to God, trusting God, and he drives us to cry out this amazing word, Abba, Father.

And we've got to understand what that means. That word Abba, it is not a 1970s pop band. The word Abba, the only people that laugh are people who are old.

But anyways, the word Abba, I mean, quite simply, it's the Hebrew and the Aramaic word for father. But it's more than that.

[18:27] It has these wonderful connotations of intimacy, just relational closeness. It's just utterly profound. My son, Caleb, is trying to talk.

And when he crawls up to me, he, he, he, and he looks at me, he doesn't say, Father. You know, he can't pronounce that.

He, when he comes, he comes up to me and he says, a da da da, a da da da. You know, the guy doesn't have teeth. It's a limited, limited number of syllables that he can, anyways, in a Hebrew family, instead, every culture in the world has a similar kind of word for parents that, that a child with no teeth can, can articulate.

So, ma, ma, ma, da, da, da, pa, pa, pa, whatever it might be. In Hebrew, in Aramaic, it would be, abba, abba, abba, right? And just like, over time, we shorten, a da, da, da, down to dad.

Israelites, and modern Israelis, people who speak Hebrew, shorten it to abba. But in the same way that, that our word dad has connections, has connotations of real relational closeness, the word abba has these profound connotations.

[19:51] It's an in the family type word. And what it signifies is this total dependence because a kid, a kid can't live without his dad, without a parent.

And it's this utter total security at the same time because when a child is with his dad, at least this is the way it's supposed to be, the kid isn't worried about danger.

Total dependence, total security. And what Paul's saying is that in the midst of this battle, this raging battle that we're engaged in as Christians, the spirit drives us to take that word upon our lips when we refer to God Almighty.

I mean, come on! God Almighty and we call him Abba! Abba! Who, does that not strike you as bizarre?

I mean, if it does not strike you as bizarre, you've been, you've gotten too used to it. Who are we to refer to God Almighty with such closeness?

[20:55] I mean, clearly, clearly, there's only one person ever that who could have any right to call God Abba.

Right? You know what I'm talking about. The only eternal begotten son of God. Jesus is the only one that could have by right called God Abba.

At his baptism, God declared from heaven, you are my son and with you I am well pleased. And then Jesus got up and he went into the desert and he resisted Satan's temptation and he proved himself to truly be the son of God.

And that's not true of us. There are lots of really good reasons why we could never, ever presume to take that word upon our lips. And here's the really good part.

Look at verse 15. There's a special name for God, Abba. There's a special name for the Holy Spirit. Do you see it? See it there?

[22 : 02] Verse 15. He's called the Spirit of Adoption. See, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, he's the Spirit of Adoption and he comes to us and he clothes us with Jesus.

I don't know how else to put it. He unites us to Jesus so that the rights that Jesus has as the Son of God are given to us.

Just like a kid, a random kid can be adopted and from that point onward he carries, he or she carries the rights of sonship and daughtership. So when the Spirit of Adoption clothes us and fills us, he unites us with Jesus so that we become the child of God.

But get this, not because we deserve it, not because we earned it, but because Jesus earned it and Jesus deserved it and Jesus gives it to us as a gift when he gives us the Holy Spirit.

You know, I hope you can see how beautiful this is because it means, friends, that when we're right in the midst of the fray, when we are buffeted and bruised and discouraged and when we look at ourselves and we think there can be no reason why I can be called a child of God.

[23 : 21] And when Satan comes and he says, how dare you call yourself a child of God? I know who you are. In that very moment, in that very moment when depression clouds out all hope of light and life with God and we can see nothing in ourselves to make us worthy before God, that's the very moment, that's the very moment when the Holy Spirit is driving us to cry out, Abba!

And when we cry out, Abba, when the Spirit drives us to cry out, Abba, God, the Father, responds and he says, this is my son and this is my daughter.

Look at verse 16. That's what verse 16 teaches. The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.

You know, just like the Holy Spirit witnessed to Jesus at his baptism that he was the Son of God, so that Jesus gives us that same spirit so that that spirit comes to us and witnesses with our spirit, stands alongside us and says, based upon the promises of God given to you in Jesus Christ, you are now a daughter and a son of God.

The Spirit does the exact opposite that Satan does. Satan whispers in your ear, you can never be one. And the Spirit says, oh yes, oh because of Jesus, yes you are.

[25 : 04] Cling to him. Let me read you from David Brainerd. Again, this was just a few days later.

Sunday, August 15th, 1742. I felt much comfort and devotedness to God this day. At night, my, at night, it was refreshing to get alone with God and to pour out my soul.

Oh, who can conceive the sweetness of communion with the blessed God except those who have experienced it? Glory to God forever that I may taste something of heaven here below.

The Thursday before, he was focused upon his vileness. And in the midst of his emotional, you know, terrible, terrible struggles, it would, and if you read through his diary, you can see this pattern again and again.

It usually happened in prayer, and that fits very well with this passage. This passage is about prayer. In prayer, the Spirit would break in on him so that he would, in the midst of his struggle, taste something of the sweetness of communion with God his Father.

[26 : 22] And that is precisely what heaven will be all about. The Spirit would drive him to his Father and bear his Father. God would say, you are my son.

And that, friends, is exactly what empowered David Brainerd to get up and go out and endure such remarkable hardships. I mean, he struggled emotionally.

Today, he would undoubtedly be diagnosed clinically depressed. He would undoubtedly have been under medical care, but at the time, there was nothing for him.

He struggled emotionally, but he also struggled physically. He had tuberculosis, and he died by the time he was 29 years old. But the thing that drove him in the midst of all that terrible, terrible suffering was he knew God's fatherly affection.

He knew who his father was. He knew who his Abba was, and he knew that he was a child of God. And the remarkable thing is, even if you look at the life of Jesus, in our Gospels, Jesus always refers to God his father.

[27 : 32] And at one time, in Mark chapter 14, Jesus actually uses the word Abba. He may have used it quite often, we don't know, but in Mark, it translates it as Abba.

And it's when he's in the Garden of Gethsemane, Mark chapter 14, he's in the Garden of Gethsemane, he knows that he is facing the cross, and what does he cry out? Abba. Abba. Abba. Not my will, but yours be done. It was Jesus, his awareness of God's fatherly affection, that got him up, and allowed him to faithfully go to the cross, and there, and there, for the first time in all eternity, he suffered, he experienced the abandonment of God, but he did that for a few hours.

He suffered utter abandonment from God, in order that you and I could cry out Abba for all eternity with him. Friends, you will suffer.

Verse 17 promises it. Those who share with Christ's sufferings will also share his glory. God's love. [28 : 51] But the thing that empowers us through suffering is the spirit of adoption that makes us cry out Abba and witnesses with our spirit.

Let me close by just addressing two groups tonight. There are those of us here who have a lot of pain associated with your fathers, with your father, with your earthly father.

And if that's you, everything I've been talking about may be just repellent to you. If you've had an abusive father, perhaps the last thing in the world you want is an all powerful one.

Let me say this, and I want to say this gently. There was a time when you were very, very young, you might not even remember it, but there was a time in which you went up to your father, maybe it was your mother, and you reached out your innocent arms in total dependence, total trust, and you were failed.

Your father failed you. And partially because you were so open to him at that moment, you totally depended upon him, you totally trusted him, his failure hurt you at a deeper level than almost anything else.

[30 : 08] And ever since then, whether you know it or not, you've been looking for something to heal that wound. And what I want to point out is that the only one that can heal that wound is the true father.

Your human father was never going to be able to meet your true needs. I will fail my son. I don't want to, but I will.

We were designed for a better father. We were designed for a heavenly one. And Jesus wants to give you the spirit of adoption wherein you will come into the relationship that will set you free, the relationship that you have desired ever since your father failed you.

The second group I want to address is those of you who are just, you're Christians and you're just slogging it out. You're discouraged, maybe you're depressed. I want to encourage you to practice praying these verses from Romans 8.

It's quite often in our prayers we ask God for stuff, we ask God to change the circumstances we don't like in life. Nothing wrong with that, but this passage calls us to pray a different kind of prayer.

[31 : 27] This passage calls us to pray and ask God, not just for things, but to ask God for himself. God is always his own best gift and he wants to give you himself.

It's not going to make everything easy, it's not going to take you out of the battle, it's not going to be skipping down the lane of Christian victory every day. It means that you will have the power to walk directly through the battle in the fray as an assured child of God.

Let's pray. God bless you.