

God the Spirit 5pm

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[0 : 0 0] Well good evening. It's great to be here tonight. I was here this morning but Sam said I could come dressed like he was this morning. So I've come like I am and I said I'm not really overdressed so that's good isn't it? Let's pray and we'll look at this passage particularly from John's Gospel tonight. Heavenly Father we thank you for your goodness to us in the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you too for the Spirit of God, for your Spirit, that Spirit who hovered over creation, that Spirit who inspired the prophets of the Old Testament and that Spirit who inspired the Apostle John to write these words for us tonight and we pray that your Spirit would continue to do his work in our hearts and minds and lives so we might get a greater picture of your glory, the work of your Spirit, so the praise and the honour and the glory might belong to Jesus in whose name we pray. Amen.

John's Gospel is a gospel that begins with very evocative words if you remember. In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. All things were made by him and without him was not anything made that was made. Evocative because what John is doing is echoing the words of Genesis 1. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and that language of creation which then speaks of God's Spirit hovering over the waters, of God's Word coming forth, is actually a reflection of the triune God in creation, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So it's often expressed this way that the Word of God characterises the Son, the Logos, God's Word, the speaking of God by his breath and the word for breath is the same as the word for spirit. Both in Hebrew language and in Greek language, the Spirit is the breath of God, if you like the empowerment of that very word. So when you get to a verse like Psalm 33, by the word of the Lord the heavens were made and all their host by the breath of his mouth. So what you've got there is a description of God's interactive working of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God spoke the word, let there be light, that word was empowered by his breath. So the Spirit of God is not something which is new to the New Testament. The Spirit with the Father and the Son always, always were. They don't have a beginning. They existed before time and we as mortals are so limited by our time, we're so temporally bound that we can't think of a language talking about the period before creation without using temporal language like before creation. But that itself is bound. God is everlasting. From everlasting to everlasting, you are God, says the psalmist.

And the Spirit of God continues to work in the Old Testament, particularly we see it in the inspiration of the scriptures, but we see it in the way in which the word of God comes to the prophets and the saints of old. But if you go back to the very beginning of Adam and Eve, you see that God's word to Adam was a word which was, he breathed into Adam, God's breath, God's spirit as it were, breathed into Adam and Adam became a living being. But on the day in which he eats of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, on that day you will die. And there death enters God's pristine good world. But it's not physical death, you notice. Adam actually doesn't die physically that day with Eve after Satan has tempted them. What happens is that Adam dies spiritually. Before that he was in a spiritual relationship with God. He was with God in the garden, walking, working, resting, loving his wife.

Children hadn't come by then, but nonetheless that would have been the fruit of their relationship. And their harmony with God and creation was at one. But when they broke covenant with God, when they sinned and rebelled against God, the penalty was death. The penalty actually is eternal death, but God in his goodness prevents that penalty from operating automatically. That's the reason why Adam and even are cast out of the garden. They're cast out of the garden because in the garden is not only the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but also the tree of life. If they were to have eaten of that tree of life in a state of spiritual death, they would have died eternally. So it's by God's mercy that he prevents them from coming into his garden again. And he

puts their cherubim and a flaming sword. Not your ordinary old seraphim, you know, cherubim, because cherubim are special angels.

[5 : 35] They're throne attendant angels. They guard the throne of God. That's why you find cherubim over the Ark of the Covenant in the tabernacle on the temple later to come. So Adam dies physically, spiritually, but God allows him to continue to be alive physically. Why? Because he has the prospect held out for him of spiritual life, of being what we call regenerated, of coming back into relationship with God out of the despair and the spiritual death that his sin has brought him in, so that God might vivify him, regenerate him, renew him, enliven him, make him spiritually alive. That's why the Apostle Paul writes to the Ephesians and says, you who were dead in trespasses and sins, you he made alive.

It's a resurrection experience in one sense. That is spiritually made alive. So that's all in the background of John 1. And when we get to John 3, we find Jesus has a conversation with Nicodemus about being born again. And Jesus says to Nicodemus, unless you're born of water and the spirit, you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven, unless you're born anew or born from above.

And the interesting thing is, that was not new teaching that Jesus was giving. Because in the conversation in John 3, Jesus says to Nicodemus, are you a teacher in Israel? And you don't know these things. He actually chides him for not recognizing that it's a spiritual work that's needed to revivify, to bring a person alive. Ezekiel has an extraordinary description of it in the Old Testament, when he sees a valley of dry bones. God breathes on those bones, and the bones come alive. Flesh is joined to the bones, and a whole army rises up. A bit like a Tolkien's Lord of the Rings almost, but better. And here is God's revivifying, energizing spirit at work. And when Jesus describes that in the language of being born again, he describes it in terms of resurrection language, a person coming from death to life. So that in John's Gospel, when we find the death of Lazarus, we find that Lazarus, four days in the tomb, Jesus comes, says open the tomb, the sisters say, look, he's going to stink. I mean, he's our brother, we know. No, but he's been four days in the tomb, so he's really going to stink. So you don't want to have that tomb opened. But they open it because Jesus says so, and Jesus says these amazing words, Lazarus, come out.

If anyone else had said that, what would have happened? Nothing. Why? Because Jesus' words are life-giving.

[8 : 50] They're spirit-empowered. The very words of Jesus come and bring life into Lazarus's dead body and makes him alive. It's a picture of regeneration. It's a picture of what's going to happen at the last day. It's a picture of so many things, but all to do with the spirit of God energizing Lazarus.

So when Lazarus wakes up, as it were, comes alive in the tomb, he hears Jesus' voice. What does he do? He gets up and walks out. He obeys what Jesus says. Why? Because he'd made a life. And you can't imagine, can you, Lazarus lying there saying, oh, I hear Jesus' voice, but I don't think I'll go. It's kind of nice here, really, a bit damp. I could redecorate a bit, but I've been here four days. I could stay a bit longer. No. When you're in the state of death and you realize what life means, you gravitate automatically. It's irresistible. What theologians describe as irresistible grace, the call of God, the beckoning of that word. And so Lazarus walks out.

Actually, he didn't walk out. He hopped out because he was all bound up in linen, but that's not the story. Anyway, the spirit of God, if you're a Christian, has made you alive.

If you're not a Christian, it's only the spirit of God that can do that. And you should therefore call upon God for his enabling spirit to enable you to believe. But for those of you who are not, who are believers, you may have a conscious memory of becoming a Christian. It might've been a scripture class or a youth group or church or a friend or a conversation or just reading your Bible.

[10 : 41] Or you may have been had the great privilege of being born into a Christian family and grown up never knowing a time when Jesus was not your savior. But regardless of the first or the second, you are in Christ because the spirit of God has made you alive. He's regenerated you.

He's made you born again. He's enabled you to hear the word of God and believe. He's unstopped your ears. He's opened your eyes so that you can actually see the truth of what it is in Jesus.

That's not anything a human can do unless the spirit of God first operates. Otherwise, we're dead in trespasses and sins unless the spirit of God makes us alive.

Well, that's the work of the spirit. Then you come to John 16 and you scratch your head and say, just a second, Jesus is talking about sending the spirit as if he hasn't come.

In actual fact, there's a verse in John 7 that says, he's talked to us about the spirit who was not yet. That's really strange. What it means is the spirit hadn't yet come. But if what I've been saying is true and should always test anything a preacher says, especially bishops, by the word of God, then what does it mean to say when Jesus says, unless I go away, the counselor will not come to you?

[12:15] The counselor being a word for the spirit. Well, you see, what Jesus is talking about is, he's talking about the coming of the spirit in a new dimension. He's the coming of the spirit, which is going to be an empowerment.

The coming of the spirit, which is actually going to bring the deliverance of salvation to God's people. What marks the Old Testament from the New Testament is promise and deliverance. The Old Testament saints were always looking forward to what God was going to do. The great salvation, the coming of the King, the coming of the Messiah, the victory over the evil one. A promise way back in Genesis 3, would you believe? Here is this expectation of the promised one coming. And what happens in the arrival of Jesus is that Jesus fulfills all the Old Testament promises about salvation for God's people. Not just for Israel, but for all nations. So the promises given to Abraham, be a father of many nations, would come true in the person of Jesus. And what we do, we live on this side of the cross. And we live now in the light of that fulfillment of the promises. And what God does now is, he says, I'm going to send my spirit to my people and bring to you all the benefits of Christ. All the benefits of salvation won. The difference between the spirit of Christ in the Old Testament and the spirit of Christ in the New Testament is that the spirit of Christ in the New Testament is the spirit of the ascended Christ. The God-man who'd won the victory, who dealt with your sins and brought you everlasting life. That, what Jesus has done, he now communicates to you. So the New Testament talks about the spirit of Christ in us.

[14:20] The New Testament also talks about, or Paul does to the Corinthians, he says, you are temples of the Holy Spirit. You'd have never said that about an Old Testament saint. You'd have never said of Abraham, Isaac or Jacob, Moses, David or Jeremiah, that they were temples of the Holy Spirit. There was only one temple, or tabernacle, or dwelling place in an altar in the patriarchal times, where the spirit of God was symbolically present in the Holy of Holies, with a cherubim, notice, over the Ark of the Covenant, the throne room of God. And the Apostle Paul says, all that belonged to the holiness of the presence of God in the temple, now belongs to you as Christians. Interestingly, collectively, as the temple of God, but individually, as temples of God. The Holy Spirit has taken up temple residence in you. That's why it's so important the way you live your life, because the spirit of God is in you. To grieve the spirit by your sin is a serious thing. It's a serious matter, because God is with you. Emmanuel, just as we sang in our song earlier this evening.

So here is Jesus talking about the spirit of truth, that he will bring, and he'll bring, as it were, with him, all the benefits of salvation, enabling us to be in relationship with God, so that to be born again under the new covenant, is to be baptized with the spirit. And you have this language of baptism. We haven't got time tonight. Someone said to me this morning, why didn't I talk about Acts 2? Because they only gave me 20 minutes, that's why. So, and I've probably taken more. But nonetheless, there's much more to be said. The whole arrival of the spirit in that extraordinary activity in the day of Pentecost, you'll notice the day of Pentecost comes after Jesus has ascended. Not even just straight after resurrection. Resurrection, 40 days, that's ascension, and then 10 days later, you get Pentecost. And there, the spirit of God comes in mighty power, signs and wonders to demonstrate the extraordinary thing that God has sent his spirit. And Jesus is the one who sent the spirit, and he sent the spirit to us, to indwell us, to empower us, that we might live lives for him. You'll notice here in verses 12 and 13 and following, Jesus says, It's very interesting.

The spirit of God, his chief task is to glorify Jesus. Whenever you talk to a person who speaks about the spirit of God a lot, listen to see if they're saying, are you glorifying Jesus? Have you noticed the harbour bridge at night? Perhaps some fireworks night or some of the night you might see it. And look at the harbour bridge and it's lit up, isn't it?

[17:52] Beautifully floodlit. And the interesting thing is, at night, you don't see the floodlights. What you see is the bridge. The floodlights don't actually draw attention to themselves.

You don't even notice where the source of light is. All you see is the light shining on the bridge. That's what the spirit does. The spirit isn't there to glorify himself, he's there to glorify Jesus. You see, there's an order in the Trinity. You've probably recognised that if you've done the Trinity over the last couple of weeks. It's not the Trinity, for example, isn't the triplets, the three brothers. Nor is it the twin brothers and the Holy Spirit. No, it's Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And that's deliberate.

That's to do with their personhood. Their divine nature is an ordered relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Son longs to do the Father's will, submits himself to the Father in coming to the world voluntarily, at one with the Father in everything. But he is the Son and God the Father. And then the Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son. You might have noticed that when we read that creed, that ancient creed, where the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.

So that relationship of order is that the Spirit comes and he takes what is Jesus and declares it to us. Now these verses actually in chapter 16 are particular to the apostles, because the apostles are going to have the significant task of delivering fresh revelation to the people of God. That fresh revelation is encapsulated for us in our New Testament. It's the apostolic deposit, if you like.

Paul says, the church is built upon the foundation of apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus being the cornerstone. Now the apostles and prophets of the New Testament, they bring the word of God. In the Gospels, they are reminded by Jesus' words. I mean, they didn't have iPads to write down what Jesus was saying on the road to Galilee, and they couldn't remember it all. So what God does, the Spirit comes and brings to remembrance all that Jesus had taught them.

And through that, he then brings fresh revelation for the New Testament, the letters of Paul and James and John, Revelation, Hebrews as well as the Gospels. So the 27 books of the New Testament become our apostolic deposit, our word, if you like, that comes to us.

[20 : 27] In John chapter 17, when Jesus defines what eternal life is, he says this, this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you've sent.

Isn't that interesting? Where is the Spirit? Well, the Spirit is here. How can they know the true God, the only true God? And how can they know of the Son whom the Father has sent? By the Spirit. You see, the Spirit is the one who enables us to learn about Jesus. The Spirit is the one who inspired these very words. In John 17, the chapter is an extended prayer of Jesus. He prays for himself first, with regard to himself and the Father. Then he prays for the 12 apostles. And then, would you believe, he prays for you.

You can notice in that third section, he says, I don't just pray for these, the apostles, but I pray for everyone who believes in me through their word.

Jesus had you in mind when he prayed that prayer. Doesn't that blow your mind? That Jesus had your name in mind. From before the foundation of the world, he's known you and loved you with an everlasting love. He's engraved your name upon the palms of his hands so that you belong to him. And he's orchestrated your life in such a way that his Spirit has come to engage your life at a particular point in time, to regenerate you, to open your eyes, to see the truth that is in Jesus.

[22 : 21] What a privilege. Nothing that you have done has earned that. Nothing that you have done has actually made Jesus do it for you, or the Spirit's had his arm twisted, if he has an arm behind his back, to do it for you. No, it's God's sovereign initiating action, what we call grace.

And the Spirit continues to be alive in the world. And notice earlier in that chapter, and he says, I tell you the truth, the Spirit, when he comes, he'll do three things.

He'll convict the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. Of sin, because they don't believe in me. Of righteousness, because I go to the Father. And of judgment, because the Prince of this world has been judged. See, the Spirit of God, the only activity of the Spirit of God in the world is to convict people. And the word convict, in the original language, has a sense of convict or convince.

And there's a sense in which the Spirit of God is continuing to convince people about Jesus by convicting them of their sins. Convicting them of the fact that Jesus has really come, that righteousness of God is demonstrated in Jesus' death and resurrection. And that in his death and resurrection, evil has been destroyed. And the Prince of this world, Satan himself, is now under wraps and ready for judgment at the last day. The Spirit of God still works in this world.

And he normally works through us. In the way we communicate with other people, or the way we pray. When you put your name on that thingy bing, that whoever's going to be there, that Sam's going to put, hopefully, as you pray for people, you're praying that the Spirit of God will take that person's heart and mind and change them. It's good to have persuasive preachers. It's good to have powerful arguments. It's good to have logic and rationality. It's good to have emotions and all the aspects of the Christian life. But I'll tell you what, without the Spirit of God working, nothing will happen.

It will be fruitless. You know, the best theological degree in the world, and don't have the Spirit of God, and you're of no worth. The Spirit of God takes a person and enables them to have life.

[24 : 51] And that's what God continues to do at the last day when the judgment comes and God gives us new resurrection bodies.

They're described as spiritual bodies. It's fascinating, isn't it? Spiritual bodies. That doesn't mean they're like Casper the Ghost type bodies, but they're bodies empowered by the Spirit.

If I said to you, think in your mind of a steam engine, you don't think of an engine composed of all steam, do you? You think of an engine, you know, very strong and metallic and all the rest of it, it's empowered by steam.

Or an electric motor. It's not just made of electricity, it's something very substantial and solid, but empowered by electricity. A spiritual body is a body empowered by the Spirit.

That's what's going to happen for us. We're going to have bodies which are going to be no longer tempted by sin. Wouldn't that be great? No longer subject to decay. No longer subject to disease.

[25 : 58] No longer subject to death. And in this world, God continues to work extraordinary miracles in our midst by seeing people raised from spiritual death to spiritual life.

God gives all kinds of other miracles too at his pleasure to wake us up, to shake us up to the reality of heaven and earth and what's going to happen at the last day. But the Spirit's active and alive and he's working mostly, he chooses to work mostly through us.

His little temples, the places where he's taken up residence, that he might purify us and make us more and more like Jesus, being transformed from one degree of glory to another so that all the praise and the honour might go to Jesus and that's the work of the Spirit.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we stand in awe at your plan of salvation, your patience with your people, your generous heart and for the plan of sending Jesus and sending your Spirit to enliven your people and to join us to Christ so the Spirit of Christ might live in us.

Father, we pray that with this fresh vision of your glory that we might live as disciples of Christ by your Spirit, giving praise to you and to your Son. for we ask it for Jesus' sake.

[27 : 30] Amen.