

# God the Spirit 930

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Date: 23 February 2013

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, it's a great pleasure to be with you here this morning and to preach in this series. It's always tricky when you preach at the, I think, the end of the series, I suppose, and not knowing exactly what's come before, not knowing whether what you're going to say might contradict what's gone before or they might contradict you.

So, but of course, teaching will continue on here week after week anyway after I've gone. But it's great to hear, to be here and to speak to you about the Holy Spirit and knowing God as Spirit.

So with that in mind and that task before us, let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your Holy Spirit. We thank you for your Spirit who inspired these words of the Apostle John so long ago.

And we pray, Father, that your Spirit might do his work in our hearts and minds and lives this morning. Father, we pray that my words might be your words, that you would bless us through your Word and by your Spirit to the praise and glory of your Son.

And we ask it in his name. Amen. John's Gospel is a deep and rich reservoir for understanding God.

[ 1 : 21 ] An ancient writer in the early church described John's Gospel as a pool in which a child may play and an elephant may wait.

Or in our view, perhaps a deep sea diver might continue to never fathom the depths of John's Gospel. John's Gospel begins, as you well know, 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. John deliberately evokes Genesis 1. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

And in Genesis 1, there's a reference to and the Spirit of God moved over the waters. And God said, let there be light, and there was light.

And there you see that Trinitarian aspect of God with regard to the creation of the world, the heavens and the earth, by the breath of his mouth, speaking words.

[ 2 : 22 ] And it's not surprising, therefore, as the Bible moves on through the Old Testament and the New Testament, that the language of breath, which of course is exactly the same word as spirit, both in Hebrew and in Greek, the Spirit of God, the empowerment of God, speaks words.

And the Word of God is characteristic of the Son of God, the incarnate Jesus. So here you get this interconnection of God, his Word and his Spirit.

If I was to quote to you from Psalm 33, verse 6, where the psalmist says, By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth.

So John introduces his gospel with this concept and understanding of God in three persons. And yet you may say, well, where is the Spirit in John chapter 1?

In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, and the Word was God. There you can clearly see the divinity of the Son of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.

[ 3 : 37 ] But as you move through John's gospel, you see that it's the Spirit of God that empowers not only his people, but also Jesus himself.

So when you get to chapter 3 of John, you have that extraordinary encounter with Nicodemus. Nicodemus, a ruler in Jerusalem, comes to Jesus by night, no doubt for fear of being seen by the other Jews and his fellow elders in Jerusalem.

And Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus reveals that he must be born again. You must be born of water and the Spirit.

And here the reference to the Spirit is arresting. We've already seen the Spirit descend upon Jesus as a dove with regard to in Jesus' baptism. We've seen the way in which the Spirit has actually empowered, not in John's gospel, empowered him to go into the wilderness for the temptation.

But here Jesus enunciates the important role of the Spirit in being born again. And the interesting thing is, that is not new teaching.

[ 4 : 49 ] It's new language, but not new teaching. And you can tell that because Jesus says to Nicodemus, are you a teacher in Israel and you don't know this?

You don't know that unless a person is born of water and the Spirit, they can't enter the kingdom of God. What does it mean to be born of water and the Spirit?

Well, being born of the Spirit is a reference to the work of the Spirit to change us from within. The work of the Spirit to enliven us. To bring us from death to life.

And the Bible's testimony with regard to that is as old as Adam. Adam and Eve were told, if you eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, on that day you shall die.

In God's mercy, Adam and Eve did not die physically that day, but they did die spiritually. There was a spiritual death that entered the human race.

[ 5 : 52 ] A spiritual death which was not characteristic of Adam and Eve's relationship with God in the garden of Genesis 1 and 2. Whereby they could talk with God and walk with God and they do God's work in the garden, till the garden, eat of the fruit.

But that all changed when they rebelled against him. And a spiritual death took place for Adam and Eve. By God's mercy, they did not die physically that day, because to have died physically that day in a state of spiritual death would have meant an eternal death.

There are three aspects to death in the Bible. The spiritual, the physical, and the eternal. If you die physically in a state of spiritual death, then the outcome will be eternal death.

What the Bible chillingly describes as the second death. But God, in his mercy, protected Adam and Eve from actually eating of the tree of life, which would have perpetuated their state of spiritual death.

And he cast them out of the garden and put before him, put the cherubim there with a flaming sword. The cherubim, of course, are not just ordinary old seraphim.

[ 7 : 12 ] They're not your ordinary garden common angels. The cherubim have a special place in scripture as cherubim of glory. They're throne attendant angels. They guard the throne of God.

And the Garden of Eden was seen very much symbolically as God's dwelling place. The Garden of God, described as such in the Old Testament. So here are Adam and Eve in this state of spiritual death.

And they, before they can be in relationship with God, must be born again. The language of being spiritually born, coming to life in God, is evident by the way in which Eve, in chapter 4, speaks of getting a child with the help of the Lord.

There is a woman of faith. There is her expression of faith. And so we see the godly line which would have begun with Abel, had he not been killed by his brother Cain.

And there you get the battle between the spiritually alive and the spiritually dead. And that battle of the seeds between those who are of God and those who are not of God, seen actually from that first human family of Cain and Abel, is demonstrated in the death of Abel and the judgment that falls upon Cain.

[ 8 : 32 ] The line of faith continues through Seth and through generations. But throughout the Old Testament, there is the reality that you can be part of the family of Abraham, but not be alive to God.

You can have all the aspects of being part of God's people, but not be alive to God. And the difference is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Theologians have described that as regeneration. For obvious reasons, regeneration is new birth, regenerating, bringing a person to life.

So when Paul writes to the Ephesians, he says, You who were dead and trespassers in your sins, you he made alive. And raised you to be with Christ and seated you in the heavenly places.

That's all a work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit actually enables us to see things as they truly are.

[ 9 : 38 ] Enables us to see reality. Enables us to hear God's word. Enables us to come to life spiritually. That's a work of the Spirit of God.

Enables us to hear God's word.

Forward and appeal at a crusade, for example. May have been taught by your parents. Became a Christian in scripture at schools. Or in Sunday school. Or some other venue.

Or a neighbour or a friend. Or just by reading your Bible. But what's actually happened is, God has brought you from death to life.

He's actually enabled you to see the truth. Whether it's from the words on the page of the Bible. The testimony of a friend or teacher or parent. Or pastor. What God has done has brought you to life.

[ 10 : 56 ] You see, we're all humans are dead in trespassers and sins. Unless God brings us to life, there is no hope.

We can't bring ourselves to life. We can't believe or by ourselves. If you can think of, if a dead person, if after a ship has sunk and there's a life raft and there are dead people floating in the sea, it doesn't matter how many life boys you throw them, they can't hold on to it.

Because they're dead. They need to be made alive before they can actually hold on to that life raft. In John's Gospel, you get the beautiful story of Lazarus.

And there, you recall, when Lazarus was dead in the tomb, Jesus speaks and says, Lazarus, come forth. Now, if anyone else had spoken like that, nothing would have happened, would it?

Lazarus would remain dead in the tomb. In fact, you can imagine, you wonder what on earth the people thought as they were gathering around that tomb. What was Jesus doing?

[ 12 : 07 ] Lazarus, come forth. Jesus didn't go into the tomb to pick up Lazarus and bring him out. Notice that? What Jesus did was he spoke life-giving words.

The very words he uttered brought life into Lazarus. And when Lazarus was brought from death to life, he hears in that instance, Lazarus, come forth.

And he gets up and walks out. He responds to the invitation of Jesus. He responds because he's been made alive.

You can't imagine him, can you, waking up in that tomb and saying, oh, Jesus is calling me, but it's not too bad here. I've been here four days. I can stay a bit longer. It's a bit damp, it's smelly, but I think it's all right, a bit dark.

No. Once he knows the condition of death that he's in, it's irresistible for him to come forth. It's the spirit of God that brings him to life and enables him to walk out.

[ 13 : 19 ]    Actually, he didn't walk out. He hopped out because it's all bound up with linen, but that's not the story. What's interesting here is Jesus is the focus.

There's no reference to the spirit in that episode of the raising of Lazarus because the spirit never works for his own glory.

The spirit always works for Jesus' glory. Have you noticed that? That's why it's almost subtle, the way in which the spirit is referenced in the Old Testament.

The spirit is always there empowering, as it were, the saints of old, the prophets. The prophets speak by the spirit of God.

The apostles speak by the spirit of God. The spirit of God is actually there, but he's always bringing glory to the Son. And you'll find that there in chapter 16 of John's Gospel, which we're looking at, where the spirit takes what is mine and declares it to you.

[ 14 : 28 ]    And he glorifies me. It's a bit like if you think of, if you look at the Harbour Bridge at night, and you'll see it's lit up by floodlights.

If you look carefully, all you can see is the bridge. You don't actually see the floodlights. The floodlights' purpose is to light up the bridge.

That's how the spirit works. The spirit's purpose is always to glorify Jesus so that the attention is upon Jesus, not upon himself.

Whenever you hear of Christian conversations talking about the importance of the spirit and they're glorying in the spirit or they're glorying in the fact that they've got manifestations of the spirit, it's always a slight danger if they're not glorifying Jesus.

For to have the spirit of God means you'll be glorifying Jesus because that's the spirit's chief task. Now let me come to parts of this chapter in John 16.

[ 15 : 41 ]    Do the second part too from verse 12 if you've got your Bibles open. I have many things to say to you but you cannot bear them now. When the spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth for he will not speak on his own authority but whatever he hears, he will speak and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

He will glorify me for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. Although the father has his mind therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Now he's talking to the apostles here and I want you to realise that he's actually talking about the coming of the spirit which is a bit strange because I've just been saying to you the spirit's already there.

The spirit's already been active in the lives of the Old Testament saints. No person could have believed in God without the spirit of God making them alive, regenerating them.

So what is Jesus saying here about the coming of the spirit? What does he mean in terms of the spirit coming? Well hasn't the spirit already been there? Haven't they already been baptised into Jesus?

[ 16 : 51 ]    Haven't they already been born again in terms of John 3 which comes several chapters before John 16? Aren't they already clean by the word that Jesus has spoken to them?

True. But what Jesus is saying is the spirit of God is now going to come in a quantitatively different manner.

In a new manner. And the language of the baptism of the Holy Spirit which you find in the book of Acts describes this coming of the spirit of God with power.

And what the main difference between the Old Testament activity of the spirit and the New Testament activity of the spirit is the same spirit of Christ which is in the Old Testament prophets we read of that in 1 Peter chapter 1 that is the unascended spirit of Christ.

The spirit of Christ's activity in the New Covenant for us as Christians is the spirit of the ascended Christ. That's why Jesus says I'm going to send another counsellor to you notice that another counsellor to you but he cannot come unless I leave you.

[ 18 : 09 ] He cannot come until I go to the Father. And what Jesus here is saying is that there's going to be a qualitative difference between the Old Covenant Christians and the New Covenant Christians and it all focuses upon Jesus and his death.

Because after his death and resurrection Jesus ascends to the Father and from there he sends the Holy Spirit. He sends the spirit of truth.

He sends the spirit of power. He sends the other counsellor. He does that and in our church year as you know we have Good Friday Easter Day and then Ascension and then Pentecost or Whitsunday in the old form.

So that movement is that Jesus sins and why does he do that from heaven? Why couldn't God have done that beforehand? Because without the death and resurrection of Jesus we're still dead in our sins.

the promise of deliverance is there and now the reality of deliverance is there. So the ascended Christ sends the spirit of Christ in order that we as Christians can appropriate salvation won, salvation accomplished.

[ 19 : 34 ] The Old Testament were always looking forward to the future. Always looking forward to the future of God's deliverance. they walked by faith. Things into which angels longed to look was a salvation that God was going to bring about through the Lord Jesus.

But we have seen that. Abraham rejoiced in Jesus' day. He saw it and was glad. He didn't fully comprehend all that God had but he knew that God had a plan and that God would execute that plan.

Abraham walked by faith. But we walk on the other side of the cross and the spirit of the accomplishment of redemption, the spirit of the ascended Christ has now come.

And what's the spirit going to do among the apostles? With the apostles he's going to be another counsellor. But don't go away, the counsellor will not come to you. But if I do go, I will send him to you.

Jesus was the first counsellor if you like. And when the spirit comes, it's another counsellor but in actual fact Jesus says it's him. It's the spirit of Christ.

[ 20 : 49 ] So to have the spirit in us as Christians is to have Christ in us. You can't separate their activity. Although they are two persons in the Godhead, it's the spirit of Christ who comes to us.

It's not an alien spirit. It's the spirit of the resurrected Christ. It's the one who brings to us the assurance of our salvation, the assurance of our forgiveness of sins, the assurance of we are heirs of heaven and the hope of eternal life, the assurance of victory won.

That's the spirit's task in us. He comes as counsellor. He comes to defend us from the accusations of the evil one. He comes to support us and strengthen us in our daily life.

He is there because he brings to us all the benefits of Jesus. And that's why the Holy Spirit is described as the spirit of Christ.

But the spirit comes, he guides the apostles into all truth. And he doesn't speak in his own authority, but whatever he learns from me, he will declare. the spirit is dependent in that sense upon Jesus as Jesus is dependent upon the father.

[ 22 : 12 ] As you've looked at the trinity over these last three weeks, you'll have seen that there is an ordered relationship in the trinity. For example, it's not the twin brothers and the Holy Spirit.

It's the father, the son, and the Holy Spirit. It's interesting, isn't it? It's not the triplets, three brothers as it were. No, it's father, son, and Holy Spirit.

There's an ordered relationships. That's why in the creed, as we said, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the father and the son. The spirit, just as the son desires to do the father's bidding, so the spirit longs to glorify the son, and in glorifying the son, he glorifies the father.

Jesus speaks about the way, if you know me, you've seen the father. All that the father has is mine. There is an equal authority among the three of them, but there's an ordered relationship in that devolving of authority to us.

So for us, the spirit of God comes and dwells in us. To have the spirit of God is to have the son, to have the son is to have the father. So we have God in us, the hope of glory.

[ 23 : 39 ] And the spirit teaches the apostles, and here this is particular, we sometimes take these verses as being generic to all of us, the spirit guides us into all truth, and there's a sense in which that is true.

But the apostles had a particular focus in terms of delivering revelation, revelation. So that again, you'll notice that we believe in the church which is Catholic and apostolic.

What does it mean to be an apostolic church? Well, an apostolic church is a church which was founded upon the apostles. In Ephesians 2.20, Paul says, the church of God is founded upon the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus being the cornerstone.

Here is the foundation of the church, apostolic and prophetic. prophetic. That's your New Testament, you see. Along with the Old Testament prophets, the New Testament apostles and prophets bring to us the revelation of God, the word of God in written form, the covenant document that God has given us to show us how to live our lives, to enable us to live in a way which pleases him.

Now that apostolic word is brought about by the spirit of God bringing to remembrance all that Jesus has said. I mean, Gen X and Gen Y can't imagine how the apostles could have worked without an iPad and to remember everything that Jesus had said.

[ 25 : 02 ] But it's the spirit of God who's actually enabled them to remember those things so they can deliver them to us. To us.

If you remember in Jesus, sometimes called the high priestly prayer of John 17, he prays for himself firstly. He prays for the apostles and then he prays for you.

In the third section, you'll notice it begins, Father, I don't pray for these only, the apostles, who have a special place in the divine economy, but I pray for everyone who believes in me through their word.

That's you. did you realise that Jesus prayed for you? He had you in mind when he spoke those words.

He had your name in his heart and mind before the foundation of the world. Your name's engrafted in the palms of his hand, for he loved you from eternity.

[ 26 : 13 ] him. And when God the Father sent Jesus to live the life we could not live and to die the death that we deserve, he did not leave us alone, but sent his Holy Spirit to empower us, to enable us, to live for him.

the wonderful aspect of the Holy Spirit, as I said to you before, is that he never glorifies himself. His chief end is to glorify Jesus.

One of the, not only the benefits, but one of the evidences of having the Spirit of God is where is Jesus in your consciousness, in your purpose, in your life?

Is Jesus the one whom you want to glorify? Is he the one whose name you want to lift high? Is he the one that's going to challenge you by his Spirit to eschew sin?

To defeat temptation? To love one another as Christ has loved us? To have the fruit of the Spirit, and you can see this sermon could go on and on, the fruit of the Spirit with all its beauty and glory of love, peace, patience, faithfulness, self-control, all those aspects of the fruit of a relationship with God that God brings about by indwelling us.

[ 27 : 37 ] Later in the Apostle Paul's teaching, he talks about our bodies as being temples of the Holy Spirit. So the Spirit of God takes up temple residence in us to sanctify us so that everything might be holy.

because God is doing a work in us to change us from one degree of glory to another so we might be perfected that last day and then we shall be given at the last day spiritual bodies.

Notice that? Bodies empowered by the Spirit. A spiritual body isn't like Casper the Ghost whispering around. A spiritual body is a bit like a steam engine.

A steam engine isn't composed of steam. It's powered by steam. A spiritual body is empowered by the Spirit of God. And in that resurrection state, there we shall be in such harmony with Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

For our spiritual bodies will be in a state of such perfection. that death shall be no more. Temptation shall be banished. Disease and decay will have gone.

[ 28 : 47 ] And we shall enjoy the inheritance of the saints in light with God forever, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And there we shall know in all our fullness what it means to know God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

But above all, to rejoice that God knows us and has given to us the bounty of his grace, the glory of his inheritance, the forgiveness of sins and the elevation and adoption of sons and daughters of the Most High, which he's done in the Lord Jesus to whom all be glory.

But through his Holy Spirit in our lives, applying all that Jesus has won for us, but ensuring the glory goes to him and to him alone.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we stand in awe at the wonder of your grace, at the beauty of your three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

And as we've reflected upon the work of your Holy Spirit, we just rejoice that he dwells in us, changing us more and more into the likeness of Jesus. Father, we pray that you would so enable us to glorify you and your Son by your Holy Spirit, that we might live lives that please you and by your mercies would be a witness to the world that they too might put their faith in you.

[ 30 : 30 ] Amen. Amen.