

The Power of the Holy Spirit

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- [0 : 0 0] As we come to these few verses, I almost want to begin by reminding you that you can lose nothing as a follower of Christ.
- The moment you become Christ's, there is really nothing that you can lose. It's worth for Christians to take big risks, because though we can lose in this world, it is a temporal loss, and it is not an eternal loss.
- And therefore the disciples can go out and be bold and faithful and trust God, because they can lose nothing. They can lose nothing.
- And the emphasis on going out is, of course, placed on others, that they may know and hear and learn of Christ and come to him in faith and trust and receive the Holy Spirit, that others would have what we would have.
- And so risk-taking is partly to do with sharing the gospel. What risks do we take to go out into a world that is frightening, it is scary, there are dark places, there are evil places, there are dangers, and we are called to go out into this world, and not fear, and have faith, and trust God, and take risks.
- [1 : 3 5] And the reason I want to frame it in that way is just to remind you this morning that you can lose nothing. Now that you belong to Christ, there is nothing that you can lose.
- You really need to understand that. Now I know that loss is often measured temporally, but when you stop thinking temporally and you set your mind on things above, not on things below, then suddenly it will change your value system of how you value gain and loss.
- Suddenly when loss is seen in the light of eternity, then temporal losses are not seen as anything that is really significant. So set your mind on things above.
- Now when we think of the Great Commission, we would normally think of the end of the Gospel of Matthew, because that's where the Great Commission is found. But as you can see in the few verses that we have read, John has his very own commission, his very own Great Commission, and it says that Jesus stood among them, and in verse 21 he said to them, Peace be with you, as the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.
- So this is John's version of the Great Commission. It's not quite as detailed as perhaps Matthew puts it, but nonetheless you can see that the Father is sending the Son, and now the Son is sending the disciples out into the world.
- [3 : 1 0] Now the key difference between this Great Commission and perhaps the Great Commission that we have in Matthew is the focus on the Holy Spirit, where Jesus breathes on his disciples and they receive the Holy Spirit, and this is of course affirmed again in Acts 1.8, which we'll get to in a moment, and they need the Holy Spirit to be able to do the work that God has called them to do.
- And we call this efficacy. In other words, if anything is going to come of anything, it'll require the work of the Spirit in the life of the believer, regarding the work of God even within their own life.
- And when a person is full of the Holy Spirit, their conversation is full of Christ. When a person is full of the Holy Spirit, their conversations are full of Christ.

And the reason for this is because the role of the Holy Spirit is to make Jesus known. John 15 verse 26. Jesus says that the Spirit is given to bear witness about me.

And of everything that Jesus could have said about the person and work of the Holy Spirit, the one thing that he does say is that his role is to bear witness about Jesus Christ.

[4 : 33] And so, when a person is filled with the Holy Spirit, their conversations are all about Christ, are full of Christ. They could be talking about anything, but Christ is present in all.

Because the role of the Spirit in the world, and the role of the Spirit in the life of the believer, is just the same. To make Jesus known. I'm, of course, changing the words. Jesus says, he will bear witness about me.

Which is another way of saying that the Spirit will make Jesus known. Well, here's the summary then of these few verses that we have read together this morning.

Jesus, after the resurrection, appears to his disciples. And, of course, you can imagine the type of fear. And they are afraid of the Jews, partly because of the situation that you have surrounding Jesus.

Now, when you look at Jesus from the point of view of the Jews and the Romans and the Christians, you end up with three different points of view, don't you? And we learned this in the series on the persecuted church, you know, with the videos.

[5 : 40] The first thing that you notice is that the Jews said that Jesus was a blasphemer, and therefore not the Son of God, not the Messiah. So that's who Jesus is according to the Jews.

To the Romans, Jesus is a criminal that was crucified as a criminal. And so when the Romans look at the Christians, they are people who follow a criminal.

When the Jews look at the Christians, they are people who follow a blasphemer. So you can see how Christians are viewed in the eyes of others. So these early disciples are behind locked doors for fear of the Jews, and now you can appreciate why, because they see in Jesus what nobody else does.

He is the Messiah, God the Son, in the flesh, resurrected. And the Jews haven't seen it at this point. They don't see it. And the Romans have crucified Jesus as a criminal.

And so Christians look like a dangerous group of people. You know, anyone who follows a criminal devotedly would look like a dangerous group of people in the eyes of the authorities, like the Romans.

[6 : 58] In the eyes of the Jews, well, this matters a great deal. And Jesus says, well, peace be with you, because, of course, there is fear amongst them.

Then he shows them his hands and his side. And the disciples are now glad to see that it is Jesus, verse 20. Then in verse 21, he tells his disciples that he is sending them out into the world.

The Father sent me, and now I am sending you. And in verse 22, Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit on, breathes on his disciples so that they would receive the Holy Spirit.

Notice then how the one who is sent by the Father now becomes the sender. The sent one has become the sender.

Jesus is the sent one, and he is now the sender. And as the Father has sent him into the world, he is now sending his disciples out into the very world that he was sent into.

[8 : 01] But he's not sending them out without properly equipping them for the work ahead of them. And so he breathes on them that they would receive the Holy Spirit, because without the Holy Spirit, they will not have the power, they will not have the efficacy that they need to be faithful witnesses.

And you'll remember Pentecost is about Jesus telling his disciples to stay where they are so that they would receive power to be witnesses.

Acts 1, verse 8. So the coming of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, is distinct from what they receive here.

What they receive at Pentecost is that power to be witnesses. In other words, Jesus is saying, don't move until this happens.

And as we read in Thessalonians this morning, when they received the gospel, they did not just receive the word of God, but they received the word of God in the power of the Holy Spirit.

[9 : 07] And the first question you've got to ask is, how did he know that? Have you ever read that verse and think, well, how do you actually know that to be true?

How do you tell when a person has received the word of God in the power of the Holy Spirit? And of course, it's explained by the verses that come after the verses that I read in our first reading this morning.

It says that the effectual work of the Holy Spirit, I'm paraphrasing, is seen in the fact that Paul was able to say to this young church that their faith has gone forth everywhere.

Paul doesn't need to say anything, because their faith has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. In other words, evangelism was undertaken by the whole church, not just the few.

Evangelism was undertaken by the whole church, not just the few. And so, when a person is filled with the Holy Spirit, their conversations are filled with Christ.

[10 : 14] And you can see the beautiful pattern of the Holy Spirit dwelling within the life of the believer. And when they are filled with the Spirit, so their conversations, their evangelism, is filled with Christ.

Their conversations are filled with Christ. And most importantly, the evangelism is just not left to a particular few, but the whole church is. And that is how Paul was able to determine that the power of the Holy Spirit came with the Word of God.

The Word of God came to them in the power of the Holy Spirit. And it's really important that you stop and ask the question, well, how do you actually know that that happened? And of course, you find the answer.

Because their conversation is filled with Christ. Everyone knows about their love for Christ. And now everyone knows about Christ, who is in relationship to the Thessalonian church, because the Thessalonians cannot stop speaking about Jesus.

Because that's how Paul knew that the Word of God came with the power of the Holy Spirit. Now, what we see is that there is a coordination between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit in creation.

[11 : 29] There is a coordination between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit in the gospel. And now there is a coordination between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and believers in evangelism.

That we have been co-opted, because we belong to Christ, into the work of God. We are now witnesses. We are now disciples. The Father sent Jesus. Jesus sends us.

And he sends us in the power of the Holy Spirit to be witnesses. We are now involved in the witness of the church. And it's really important that you make sure you get the question the right way around.

Does the church produce missionaries? Does the church produce missions? Or does the mission produce the church? And of course, the mission produces the church.

How? Because without God sending his Son into the world in the work of the Holy Spirit, you wouldn't have a church. And what you have is we are now involved in the great co-mission, because we have been co-opted into the work of God that is already at work in the world, that's already working.

[12 : 40] God has already been working in the world through the Lord Jesus Christ. And through Christ, he has produced a church. And through that church, then produces missions. And through those missions, then produces churches.

And so on, and so on, and so on. And that's why it's called a co-mission rather than your mission. You have been co-opted into the work of God and the power of the Holy Spirit.

So at the heart of this is dependence. And at the heart of dependence is what we must work on to understand this morning. Number one, the work of Jesus Christ is vicarious, and the work of the Holy Spirit is cooperative.

Let me explain. When we say that the work of Christ is vicarious, what we mean is that what Christ did, he did on your behalf. There was nothing that you needed to contribute. There was nothing that you needed to do in order to save yourself.

You couldn't save yourself. Christ has done it all. From beginning to end, he is the author and perfecter of your faith. Christ has vicariously saved you.

[13 : 48] He has vicariously redeemed you. When you get to the work of the Holy Spirit, you begin to realize that the work of the Holy Spirit is cooperative. In other words, the Holy Spirit doesn't do it for you.

The Holy Spirit does it with you. You are to keep in step with the Spirit. You are to pray in the Spirit. You are to do all of these things in the Spirit.

Now, a cooperative work is very different than a vicarious work. Because when you're in partnership with someone, you are able to grieve the partner. And so we are warned in Scripture, aren't we, that we must not grieve the Holy Spirit.

Why? One, because he's a person, of course. But also because we are bound with him. We are now cooperatively involved in the same work.

And so who's going to take the lead? Okay? If it is a cooperative work, it surely cannot be an equal partnership. We cannot have equal partnership in the work with God.

[14 : 52] It must be led by God. And people must be able to keep in step with the work of God within their lives personally. And, of course, within their church as they do the work of the gospel.

The first thing that we must recognize in dependence, then, is that dependence is incredibly hard. Because dependence means working in cooperation with the Spirit of God.

It means not grieving the Spirit. It means keeping in step with the Spirit. That is what it means to depend on God. You are understanding your relationship with God in the Spirit.

And you are keeping in step, understanding what God is doing in the world. And you follow along with him. Secondly, at the heart of dependence, you have to acknowledge your own weakness.

That you cannot do God's work or many other things in the flesh successfully. It will just come to nothing. This is why Jesus told his disciples, don't go anywhere until you receive the power to be witnesses.

[15 : 57] Because you cannot do this work in the flesh. It will bring no success whatsoever. So the disciples have to recognize what is within their ability and what is way beyond their ability.

And being a witness is beyond your natural ability. Being a witness is beyond your fleshly abilities. You cannot do it in the flesh successfully.

It has to be done in Christ. In the power of the Holy Spirit. And thirdly, when it comes to dependence, not only must you have a desire, must you recognize your need to be dependent and your weaknesses, you must also have a desire to share in the work of the gospel.

And of course, those in Thessalonica did. And the early disciples did. Very simply because of this reason. That a person who is filled with the Holy Spirit is filled with the same desire that the Holy Spirit has to make Christ known.

So a person filled with the Holy Spirit has their conversations filled with Christ. Now at the heart of this work of dependence, as we said, we're still at the heart level, is also our identity.

[17 : 26] Now we must recognize who we are in Christ. We must recognize who we are and what it means to be a witness. So when you are a witness, what are you a witness to?

Have you ever asked that? What are you actually a witness to? Well, you are firstly a witness of the ear of the gospel.

That you have a knowledge of what Christ has objectively done, vicariously speaking. And then, conversely, or additionally, you are a witness of your own work of God in your life.

To the work of God within your own life. And now you're able to share not only what God has done objectively. Christ has done this vicariously. But you're also able to share what God has done for you.

How that has impacted your life. So you're a witness on two counts. Number one, you point to the work of God. Number two, you point to the work of God within your life.

[18 : 38] And therefore, what you're pointing to is your change of identity. Have you ever wondered why that when Satan tempted the woman and Adam in the garden, he tempted the woman and Adam was right beside of her.

I don't think we should ever have this idea that Eve was by the tree of knowledge of good and evil and Adam was somewhere else. I think it's very clear that Adam was right beside of her when she was being tempted.

And of course, he failed as a husband. And of course, when his wife fell into sin, momentarily, he hadn't eaten. She had eaten, but he hadn't eaten.

At that point, he should have done the very thing that Christ did. But he didn't. He should have said, God, the bride has sinned. My wife has sinned. Take my life from the place of hers.

But he didn't. And we know that that's what he should have done. Because when you get to the New Testament, that's the very thing that Jesus does do. Okay? He lays down his life for his bride, for his wife.

[19 : 47] Okay? Go read the end of Revelation. You can see the beautiful picture of what is meant to happen. But have you ever wondered why Satan attacks people? I mean, Satan could have set the trees on fire.

He could have damaged any other part of creation. But he didn't. He went after the one part of creation, the only part of creation, that was made in the image of God.

Because his desire was to destroy the identity. It was to destroy the identity of God and the people of God. And to just destroy that identity completely.

To destroy that image. And so when Adam fell into sin and his wife fell into sin, it tells you in Genesis 5 that their children were not made in the likeness of God.

No longer were children in the image of God. They were in the image of sinful man. So it says Adam and Eve had children. You know, obviously the first two didn't turn out too good.

[20 : 51] And then Seth came along. And of course, he was made in the likeness of Adam. It specifically says he was made in the likeness of Adam. To teach us that Adam's descendants of sinful man and woman are no longer in the image of God.

And so the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer is not just convincing us that we are saved. But actually are convincing us that we are children of God being restored back into the image of God.

So it says, doesn't it, that the Spirit of God, his Spirit, witnesses with their Spirit that we are what? Children of God. In other words, it is absolutely crucial that you appreciate that the work of the Holy Spirit within your life is to convince you and assure you who you are.

You are made and being restored in the image of God through the person and work of the Holy Spirit. And so the heart of dependence is you knowing who you belong to.

And now that you know that you belong to God, now that the Spirit of God is within your spirit convicting you and assuring you that you are a child of God, you now serve the one that you belong to.

[22 : 05] Not only are you restored, you're being restored to look more and more like Christ. Now when the Spirit of God enters your life, the Spirit does not lose his own personality.

The Spirit is a distinct person within the life of the believer. And the reason this has to be so is because the Spirit in the life of the believer causes a particular kind of conflict.

And the conflict that happens within your life is the conflict between the Spirit and the flesh. And this is why Paul says in Galatians that we are to keep in step with the Spirit because they are at war with each other to stop us from doing what we want to do.

Have you ever noticed how Paul puts what we want to do on the side of sinfulness? And it requires the work of the Spirit within us to stop us doing the things that we want to do.

In other words, if we were left to ourselves, we would continue on sinfully. And the only thing stopping us is the presence of the Holy Spirit within the life of the believer.

[23 : 11] It is the work of the Holy Spirit that actually convicts us and is stopping us from doing the things that we want to do, live according to the flesh. And so the presence of the Holy Spirit within the life of the believer means that there is a particular kind of conflict.

But a conflict that is good so that God would bring out of you the work that he has put into you. And we read that in Philippians, don't we? That he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion.

And also God works in you to willing to work according to his good pleasure. God puts it in you and he's working it out of you by the power and work of the Holy Spirit.

So now I hope you're beginning to understand the kind of work that God has done in your life by giving you the Holy Spirit. So how does this hard work of dependence begin?

In other words, if you're going to go and start practicing dependence, where do you begin? At what point do you begin? Well, having considered everything that we have mentioned, your own weaknesses, the reason you cannot do things in the flesh, the need for the Spirit against sin and against working in the flesh, the presence and the promise of the Holy Spirit.

[24 : 27] Having considered all of that, where do you begin? Because this is a cooperative work. We know what the Spirit has done. What must you do? What are you going to do in light of what you're hearing?

Well, John Murray said this, and you should know by now I like John Murray. I haven't got all of his books, but I plan to there at some point. But John Murray said this, that when we dishonor, we dishonor the Spirit when we do not exercise complete dependence on him.

We dishonor God. We dishonor the Spirit because we believe in the Trinity, don't we? Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We dishonor God when we do not exercise complete dependence on him.

And that would be enough for most people to hear and know what they need to do next. However, the trouble seems to be that we are living in times where people don't actually know what to do next when they hear something like that.

And I think that's part of the problem. That we can hear a true statement, but we don't actually know what to do with it. We don't actually know how to...

[25 : 47] So we hear you must depend on God, and it's a wonderful statement. But the more important question that needs to be asked is, how? How are you going to depend on God?

How are you going to do it? And the answer, of course, is very simple. It begins with prayer. It begins with bringing yourself before God and literally declaring that you are like Murray McShane did.

Robert, his name's gone. Robert Murray McShane, yeah. The John Murray and the Murray, it's confused me. A man is nothing more than what he is on his knees before God.

And that's it. A man is nothing more than what he is on his knees before God. When people don't know what to do, they should ask. They should bow down and come before God.

Because there is a difference between hearing you must depend and depending. Most ministers, if not all ministers, are convicted when they read in Acts chapter 6 that half of the disciples' ministry was spent on prayer.

[27 : 06] Half of what they did was spent on prayer. The other half, of course, was word ministry, in the spirit, and everything else but prayer.

When you look at the amount of time that Jesus, God the Son, spent in prayer, and then you think, can I really manage on less than he did?

You know, simple observations like this make us question. And I think what happens is we get used to a speed of life like we had pre-COVID.

And then something like COVID happens and we get used to a speed of life now. And it becomes very difficult for some people to get back to the previous speed and the previous motivation and the previous energy.

And I think that that's probably a good illustration and observation of what it is like spiritually. Hence why so many Christians in their earlier Christian life, are quite fervent and quite energetic.

[28 : 15] But then there becomes a plateau. A lack of spiritual progression and maturity. Not a lack of service in the church. Not even a lack of commitment.

Not even a lack of attendance. But a lack of actual maturity. And I think these things creep in and we become so used to them that we now think this is the Christian norm.

And it may be very abnormal. But we just, it would be impossible for us to recognize it. And so we begin with prayer to bring us back to the reality of God's word in the power of the Holy Spirit because that is what we need.

The effectual power in the life of the believers in Thessalonica was the Holy Spirit. It came with the word and the power of the Holy Spirit.

And so we are left with a clear distinction between what can be done in the flesh, very little, and what can be done with the person and work of the Holy Spirit present. And so Paul encourages the church in Ephesians, doesn't he, to pray always in the Spirit.

[29 : 29] To pray always in the Spirit. Whatever you do, you do it always in the Spirit. So where does this leave us? Well, it leaves us in the very place that we ought to know where we ought to be or we are.

And that is not one of us can move and make a movement without being convicted and empowered by the Spirit of God.

If we do, it'll come to no effect. We are, as Paul says in Galatians, to keep in step with the Spirit. And I think it becomes obvious when we are out of step.

Because we can do nothing apart from God. We can do nothing that is effectual. And we need the power of the Holy Spirit to be with us. And therefore, we must be consciously dependent on the work of God within our own life.

And consciously dependent on what it means to go out. You may have plenty of desires. You may have plenty of forward thinking. But I can guarantee you now, if you're not paying attention to the Word of God and the work of God within your own life, as it corresponds here, then it's going to be very unlikely you're going to receive the kind of maturity in growing up that the Bible promises for those who continue to walk with Christ.

[30 : 51] You will be like those in Hebrews who are on the verge of forever turning back because you're not quite sure whether or not how much forward you can go. There is no blessing outside of Christ.

There is no blessing outside of Christ. There is no blessing in pursuing anything in the flesh. Therefore, we must be consciously Christian and consciously sensitive and consciously dependent on the Spirit of God.

Now, here's the exhortation. Well, since we are to pray at all times in the Spirit, because praying is the most powerful resource that the Church has, it would seem obvious that we should spend more time in prayer than what we do.

If prayer is the most powerful resource that God has given to the Church, it would seem obvious to spend more time in it than we do. And it seems to me that prayer is probably the best cooperative work that God has actually given us to do.

We pray and God answers. We pray and God answers. God has given us prayer for the work of His will on earth.

[32 : 13] We pray, God answers. Whether we're praying for individuals, whether we're praying for the Church, whether we are praying for evangelism. And let's not forget that the disciples are told to go nowhere until they receive Pentecost, until they receive the power to become witnesses.

In other words, if we can flip that on His head and say, well, what is it saying? It's saying this. Jesus is telling His disciples that they are not to go ahead of Him, that they are not to go ahead without God.

Don't do anything without God. wait until you receive power to become witnesses. And so we return to our original statement.

Those who are filled with the Holy Spirit have their conversations filled with Christ. Those who are filled with the Holy Spirit have their conversations filled with Christ.

Amen. Amen.