

The Jesus Series: RELY, Part 5

Sunday, November 11, 2018

John 7:37-39

In this stop through the Gospel of John, we are hovering above this passage (v37-39) where Jesus cries out to the crowd at the Temple, “if anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified’”. As we hover over this verse, for our 5th week today, we are talking through our desperate need and our clear command to **RELY on Christ as a way of life**. In this little series two weeks were spent on exposing our tendency toward **self-reliance** as well as our temptation to place our trust in the wrong things (cultural, created things) to try and find satisfaction for our inner thirst. Two weeks were spent on the gift that Christ gives, **the rivers of living water**, placed within our dry, and weary souls - namely the Holy Spirit; who is co-equal and co-eternal with God the Father and God the Son. One God in three persons. We looked at who the Holy Spirit is and his specific works in the world and particularly in the life of believers. And now with the final two weeks we are going to consider the practical application of life with the Spirit, and the gifts He enables for works of ministry and service to the church.

As we do this today, I want to exhort us again toward the purpose of **RELY**, which is not intended to simply puff us up with knowledge. Gospel truth, is vitally important for the Christian to feed upon and grow up into. But as we talked about last week, **LifeTruth: Our faith is not about gathering in new ideas, and participating in a series of rituals. God’s work through Jesus was to move true religion from the realm of merely external acts and to make it about internal experience and transformation**. That is what John was speaking of in chapter 7; At that time the Spirit had not been given in this radically new way - the very way that you and I can now experience through faith. And I am using the word experience intentionally - the reality of the Holy Spirit is not a mere fact of doctrine for us to believe. **It is life-altering**; and I say that with the strongest of emphasis. So this morning I echo AW Tozer, who once wrote:

“Many of us have grown up on the theology that accepts the Holy Spirit as a Person, and even as a divine Person, but for some reason it never did us any good. We are as empty as ever, we are as joyless as ever, we are as far from peace as ever, we are as weak as ever. What I want to do is tell you the old things, but while I am doing it, to encourage your heart to make them yours now, and to walk into the living, throbbing heart of them, so that from here on your life will be altogether different” - **AW Tozer, How to be Filled with the Holy Spirit**

This is my prayer for us at Agape - I want this to be one of the definable characteristics of this local expression of the global church. That we RELY on Christ and His Spirit as a lifestyle - When we are together and when we are apart. That we would not simply ask God to bless whatever we are doing, but that we would walk with Him in such strong fellowship that we could

recognize what He is doing and ask to join Him. I pray that we would not try to build this church up on solely human effort, only to find ourselves running hard *on a treadmill*, spilling out tons of energy yet finding ourselves going nowhere. I pray that we would consistently walk in close step with Christ, praying that **He would build His church here, empowered and sustained by His Spirit**; unhindered in whatever He has planned. And that the rivers of living water would flow so strongly in us, we would know the mind of Christ and ask Him for BOLD things in line with his will; Holding to the promise of **John 14** that we looked at last week, **“Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do that the Father may be glorified in the Son”**.

PRAY

So today, we are centering on a practical question when it comes to this concept of RELY: How do these doctrinal truths about the person and about the work of the Holy Spirit, become for us experiential reality? **How do we not just talk about the empowerment from the Holy Spirit but actually live it?** *Is it automatic - Do you have all of the Holy Spirit that you need when you are born again? Is there a second encounter with the Spirit that must take place - do some of us have the Spirit and some do not? Must we work to make this empowerment effective to us - is there a prescribed formula to get the Spirit to come upon us?*

Let me say at the outset - that there are many, many miles of questions, topics, even debated issues that could spring off of the subject matter we are dealing with today. And to walk through all of those would take weeks potentially, and even then we would still have questions. For the purpose of this sermon and series, we are going to concentrate our focus on what I consider to be 3 solid principles in the word, from which we can try and reach some conclusions as to how the work of the Spirit becomes experiential reality for us. But I do make myself available to you as always if at the end of these message you would like to talk through additional lines of thought that we could not cover today.

Principle #1: Believers receive the Holy Spirit the moment they are united with Christ through faith (also known as salvation or being born again).

Back in April in a sermon called Encounter with Nicodemus we dealt with **John 3:1-11**. Jesus tells Nicodemus that **unless a person is born again, they cannot see the Kingdom of God**. Jesus further describes **being born again** as being **‘born of water and the Spirit’**. I proposed to you at that time that in saying this Jesus was making a reference to an old Testament prophecy in **Ezekiel 36**; or at least the subject matter in it. Water in the OT symbolized cleaning or purification. And in **Ezekiel 36:25,27**, God describes the new covenant salvation that will come this way: **“I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean...And I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes”**. Jesus tells Nicodemus that a person must be born again (or born from above) and he ties it to being born of water and spirit; In essence then what is salvation? **By grace, through faith, God makes us clean from all our sin and gives His Spirit within us.**

So by this principles we know that **every Christian has God’s spirit in them**. Every believer has received the Holy Spirit. This is the very essence of being born again. We saw this last

week in [Ephesians 1:13](#), In [Christ] you also, *when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.* When you heard and believed the Gospel, you were sealed by the Holy Spirit. And one more in [Galatians 3:13-14](#), “*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, because it is written, Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree. The purpose was that the blessing of Abraham would come to the Gentiles by Christ Jesus, so that we could receive the promised Spirit through faith.*”

I am stressing this because In my formative years, I grew up under a rather prominent denominational teaching that said the Christian life was a 2 stage experience. The first stage was believing upon Christ for the first time (being born again). But not present in the first stage was receiving the Holy Spirit. This happened for some people as a subsequent event perhaps moments after being born again or years later where the Holy Spirit would come upon you - evidenced typically by speaking in tongues - and from that point on you would live in His power.

Now, I am a continuationist. That is a big word that means I do not see any strong biblical evidence that any of the Spiritual gifts we see in the New Testament have ceased today. Therefore I affirm that the Holy Spirit can, as He wills, give any gift at any time. Therefore someone who is being empowered by the Spirit, could exhibit miraculous gifts that we may not fully understand but have a purpose in God’s Kingdom. But I do not believe that there are 2 stages to the Christian life. And I think one of the dangers in this teaching is that it creates a 2 class Christianity; the Haves and the Have nots. Where in one corner you have those ordinary Christians and in the other corner the Spirit filled Christians. I believe this is a division that is not supported by the New Testament. On the contrary, [1 Corinthians 12:12-13](#) speaks of the unity of the church saying, *For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.* All believers, baptized by Christ, into the Spirit at the point of your conversion.

[Principle #2: The New Testament exhorts believers to spiritual growth, including a continual filling of God’s Spirit.](#)

I do believe the testimony of many, many Christians who tell of moments subsequent to their initial coming to faith in Christ that they experienced a undeniable change in their spiritual life; wherein they began walking in a newness of love for God and His people, peace in their hearts, joy in their worship, power in their witness, and even new spiritual gifts. Some of you may have experienced this. So while I disagree with the view of a 2 stage Christian life, we need to say that for many other denominations, including ours, the danger is that we minimize or deny the reality of additional experiences with the Holy Spirit; we must not assume the measure of Spiritual empowerment we have at our conversion to faith is all we will ever have. The bible commands us in a variety of terms, to seek greater fellowship with God’s Holy Spirit. We have all received the Holy Spirit, but not all believers walk with him in the same way. And while different people might use different terms to explain these additional experiences, I believe the best NT term is **being Filled with the Spirit.**

That is exactly the term that Paul exhorts born again Christians to In **Ephesians 5:18**, **Be filled with the Spirit**. Paul uses a present tense imperative that could be more explicitly translated, "*Be continually being filled with the Holy Spirit*".

The implication there is that this act of being **filled with the Spirit** should repeatedly occur with Christians. It is NOT just a one time act. Being filled is not something that occurs at salvation and then never again - otherwise there would be no need for this command.

When we see in the New Testament these descriptions of being filled with the Spirit, there are 2 common characteristics: **1)** The filling happened to believers and **2)** it is followed by increased or extraordinary power for life and ministry.

A few examples, **Acts 2:4** - The day of Pentecost, believers were **filled by the Spirit** resulting in the miraculous gift of speaking in tongues as well as 3,000 conversions. **Acts 4:8**, Peter and John were **filled with the Spirit** and **Acts 4:31**, gathered believers were filled with the Spirit both resulting in bold preaching even in the face of persecution. **Acts 9:17**, Saul is filled with the Holy Spirit after his conversion, resulting in miraculous healing, strengthening, and inauguration to ministry. **Acts 13:9** we see Saul again filled with the Spirit to engage in spiritual warfare, and **Acts 13:52** disciples filled with the Spirit resulting in greater joy even after experiencing rejection while doing ministry work.

Someone might object and ask how someone who has received the Holy Spirit already - can then be filled with Him or need to be continually filled with Him. If a glass of water is full, how can you put more into it? As one NT scholar put it, "*a good analogy might be a balloon, which can be full of air even though it has very little air in it. When more air is blown in, the balloon expands and in a sense it is more full. So it is with us. We can receive the Holy Spirit, yet we are able to receive much more of him as well*". (**Grudem**)

When we are asking God to fill us with His Spirit, we are asking for "an event subsequent to conversion in which a believer experiences a fresh infilling with the Holy Spirit that may result in a variety of consequences, including greater love for God, greater victory over sin, greater power for ministry, and sometimes the receiving of new spiritual gifts" - Wayne Grudem

Principle #3: The filling of the Holy Spirit should be expectantly sought with sincere preparation.

So taking the first two principles: We receive the Spirit at conversion, but we can experience fresh infillings of the Spirit throughout our Christian life. I do not believe the bible gives us a formula for this to happen, whereby we must work for it or follow the right pattern. Certainly, at anytime God could choose to grant us this filling without any movement on our part. But I also do not think we should just presume upon this gift or wait for it to automatically happen. I believe that it is right and good for us to ask to be filled with the Spirit.

In **Luke 11**, the disciples of Jesus asked him how to pray. After giving them the Lord's prayer Jesus tells an amazing story of one friend knocking on the door of another friend late at night asking for bread for a house guest. The one friend is already in bed and doesn't want to get up. But eventually, because of the persistence (and Jesus says the impudence of the neighbor) he gets up and gives him what he asks for. **That a fairly amazing story to tell when you are asked how to pray!!!** Then Jesus says this, "I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. **10**For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. **11**What father among you, if his son asks for^d a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; **12**or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? **13**If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

So we here are told to ASK for the Holy Spirit and I believe we should ASK expectantly. Since believers already have the Spirit, I do believe this is an invitation to ASK for a fresh infilling and empowering. Much like James told us to ask for wisdom, and do not doubt God will provide, I do believe we should ask to be filled with the Spirit and should not doubt that God will answer. But based on the story Jesus told here and his subsequent commands, I think we are being called to ask and keep on asking. Ask for His works: all that we looked at last week. Ask for renewed love, for holiness, for joy, for peace, ask for spiritual gifts and empowerment in your existing gifts to strengthen the church. Believe that HE can do more in you and through you; which is really the point of RELY. Believe he can do more in you and through you than any other fountain of satisfaction.

But as we ask, I do not believe it should be done flippantly. There should be sincere preparation on our part as we ask. I base this off of two realities that the New Testament teaches us. 1) We can grieve the Holy Spirit. We can bring Him sorrow by our actions. **And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Ephesians 4:30-31.** Obey God. It would be insincere to pray for more of the Holy Spirit and deeper fellowship with Him, when by your actions you are grieving Him. Repent of sin, and obey. This is not a call to perfection. This is a call to sincere seeking.

The other New Testament reality is that 2) We can quench the Holy Spirit's work in our lives. **Do not quench the Spirit. 1 Thessalonians 5:19** Now, how we quench the Spirit is another sermon all together. But here is the immediate context, Paul tells them **Do not despise prophecies.** The Thessalonians apparently despised manifestations of prophecy, perhaps because of the nature of what the prophecy said or perhaps because they were not open to miraculous gifts. But either way Paul warned - this would stifle the Holy Spirit's work among them. He goes on to tell them to test everything - which means that we weigh NT prophecy against the word of God. But from this I would say that we, as a matter of preparation, should yield to the leading of the spirit and be open to His work. If we resist what He is doing or saying, either because we do not want to follow or because it offends our senses- then we are potentially cutting ourselves off from fresh infillings of His presence.