

'Being the Church' - Part 11

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As this series comes to an end, we have been exploring the central role of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus of Nazareth and in the life of the early Church He birthed - that Church which Jesus is still building today through His Spirit. As Jesus learned how to host the Holy Spirit and defer to Him at every point in His earthly journey, we are being challenged to do the same here and now, so that every step we take is in step with the Spirit of God. We have more than a message to host. We have more than a job, an occupation or a ministry to steward. We have a Person – a Person Who has so intimately and so intensely devoted Himself to us that He rests upon us and is released within us - literally changing our environment wherever we go.

The Spirit has been given to us without measure, without limit. Any limitations are on our side of this glorious partnership. We are the ones who deny ourselves, our families, our Church and our nation the power and wonder of Christ in us, the hope of glory. We are the ones who grieve and quench the Holy Spirit and deny Him access to our thoughts, our hearts, our lives and our wills. This whole concept of God the Holy Spirit resting on us and flowing through us is awesome, it's extreme, it's mind-boggling – but it also happens to be true.

Now Jesus made a very interesting statement one day when He was here among us. We can read it in John 6. He said, *"My words to you are Spirit and they are life."* Think through this. *"My words are Spirit ... and the Spirit gives life."* This particular sermon of Jesus in John 6 was the most offensive sermon He gave in His entire three and half year ministry. He started with a crowd of almost twenty thousand people and He ended up with just a handful of disciples. Even I haven't upset that many at once! He so offended the crowd that most of them walked away and refused to accept what He was teaching. However, Jesus was simply telling them what the Father told Him to say, through the Spirit.

Sometimes the Father will bring a word to us that we don't understand or accept, just to test our heart. Did you know that God is in the business of revealing hearts? Often He does that by offending our minds. At such times we are forced to ask, *'Am I in this for intellectual gratification? Do I need to be in control? Do I need to manage this issue or these people?'* ... or ... *'Am I totally yielded and surrendered in my relationship with God and am I willing to embrace what I don't understand?'*

That's what the Lordship of Christ looks like in our lives. It's when we are able to say, *'I don't get this. I don't understand it. But I do know His voice and I will heed that voice regardless.'* When we step outside human reasoning and our own sense of personal control then all of heaven shows up to confirm and celebrate our obedience to the Lord. Every believer is put into that kind of position many times in their lives and some of them let their flesh, their mind, their pride, their fallen humanity have its way and some let the Spirit of God have His way. The outcome of those two choices are radically different. One feeds and empowers our flesh and our need to control people and the circumstances of life - the other empowers our surrender to the Holy Spirit and Christ's mission to advance His kingdom.

I can tell you from personal experience, and from counseling and walking alongside thousands of brothers and sisters over many years, that **you will not get the peace of God which passes all understanding until you give up the need to understand!**

There are many things I do understand about God, my life and the mission of Christ. For that I am grateful – but that understanding is a bonus, it's not my right and nor do I have to understand in order to follow God's voice. One of the most powerful and liberating things a human being can do before God is to lay down the right to be in control and choose to follow the Holy Spirit – even if, and especially when, we don't fully understand what's happening or why.

Now there are two instructions the Apostle Paul gives us regarding this relationship with the Holy Spirit and they are both essential. The first one is, *“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit.”* (Eph. 4:30). The second one is, *“Do not quench the Holy Spirit.”* (1 Thess. 5:19) These two warnings serve as guard rails, if you like, in our walk with God. As we journey through life and are careful not to grieve or quench the Holy Spirit in thought, word or deed, then our relationship with Him and our understanding of His role in our life and the ministry of the Church continues to grow and mature and His empowering presence grows accordingly. I'll come back to those two guard rails in a minute, but let me go back to what Jesus said.

Jesus said, *“My words to you are Spirit and they are life.”* So here's Jesus, the Word made flesh, and when He speaks, the Word of God is made Spirit. Something happens when you find the heartbeat of God and speak it out. Some of you know this from experience. Many of us in ministry have been in that situation when we are talking with a brother or sister about God and it might be in a home group or just over coffee and we are discussing the things of God and then out of our own mouth comes words which are so spot on, so appropriate, so right for that moment, that there is no way in the world we thought that stuff up! Suddenly the whole atmosphere changes and there is a Presence we did not experience before. What just happened? It's simple really. Words became Spirit and that Spirit gave life! We are responsible stewards of the words of a Person and each day we walk between these guard rails of grieving the Spirit or quenching the Spirit and as we learn how to move in that anointed space our lives and our ministries are transformed. These are not legalistic barriers, they are necessary guard rails which we should welcome.

Now to grieve the Spirit is to sin in thought, in ambition or in attitude of heart. That grieves Him and brings Him much pain when we choose to do something that would undermine our purpose. To quench Him means we restrict the flow of the Spirit. We hinder His movement in us or those around us or in our ministry or Church. Do you know how we pick up a garden hose which is running, usually with a sprinkler on the end, and we kink the hose to stop the flow so we can move the sprinkler? Well that is the concept behind this word quench. We restrict the flow of the Spirit through our unbelief or our need to control people or situations or through our demonic fears and doubts. Grieving is about character. Quenching is about power and flow. Which is more important – character or power? Well, that's like asking a bird, 'Which is more important – your left wing or your right wing?'

Jesus is calling a people who can display purity and power and this relationship we have with the Holy Spirit puts us in that place where deep in our heart of hearts we have this confidence that nothing is impossible with God.

God is raising up a people who will no longer be satisfied with human accomplishments which we then call ministry. I am thankful for the talents, skills and experience which people in the Church have been given. I am thankful for the buildings we can erect and enjoy in the Lord's name. I am thankful for the works of service we can perform and the mission projects we can launch or support. That's all great, but at the end of the day if we have not truly invaded the impossible, the supernatural, then we have not demonstrated the gospel as it was meant to be demonstrated. The things that you and I should remember most are the things that we cannot take credit for – the things that we saw God do.

How did Jesus turn the world on its head, impact so many people and draw such huge crowds? The answer is simple. It was because when people came to Jesus they encountered God, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Why did the early Church explode across the world and unite the most divided community in history and reap such a mighty harvest for so long? It was because when people came into contact with the those early Apostles and disciples, they encountered God through the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit.

Brothers and sisters I beg you to listen to this, in Jesus' name. When Jesus said, *"On my own I can do nothing,"* that is exactly what He meant. Without the presence, power and ministry of the Holy Spirit in Jesus and through Jesus all the world had was a carpenter from Nazareth with a bunch of crazy ideas! Without the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, the day of Pentecost would never have happened, the Church would never have been born and history would never have been re-written by a handful of ordinary people. Without the presence and power of the Holy Spirit right here and now, in your life, in my life, in this Church and in its leaders ... we have nothing to give, nothing to say and nothing we could possibly do which would impact the world around us!

To those who may long to see this building full to overflowing one day I say this: God is not going to send people to us so they can encounter me or our musicians and singers or any of you. God will send people to us if and when those people can encounter God in our midst and when they do, they will never be the same again and nor will our Church. Our programs, our ministries, our services, our sermons, our songs, our prayers, our very lives mean nothing, will amount to nothing and will have zero impact on the needs of this world until we learn to walk in the Spirit as Jesus walked in the Spirit.

Without the active ministry of the Spirit of God we have nothing to give, nothing to offer and no power to change anything in this dysfunctional, broken world! God is the only One Who has ever changed history and God will change history again through us, here and now, if we let the Holy Spirit have His way in us and among us! The power of the gospel needs to flow through yielded vessels who say, *'I'm tired of the status quo; I'm tired of routine; I'm tired of traditional boundaries; I want to see Jesus glorified the way He is in the Book!'*

Let me take you to Matthew 10. Verse 7 reads, *"And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand....'"* Pretty simple message. That was it. Maybe you missed it. So let me read it again. Here's the sermon Jesus gave them to preach: *"And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" Then, when you have given people that context, when you have preached that simple sermon ... then show them the kingdom of heaven in action: (verse 8) ... "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give."*

Now there are a lot of people in the church today who don't know what to do with Matthew 10. Many ignore it. Some fear it and wish it was not there. Some just don't believe it and some are challenged by it. But this chapter is like 'Ministry 101' for the disciples of Jesus. Just picture it. Jesus pulls them together and they sit in a circle and He says,

"Ok. It's time for you to do the stuff. It's time for you to embrace your calling, pursue your purpose and truly follow Me. Here is what you need to preach ... write this down ... 'The Kingdom of heaven is at hand.' That's it. Then, you need to show them what the kingdom of heaven looks like. You need to release heaven on earth and heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead and cast out demons. I have already given you everything you need freely, so now get out there and freely give it away."

Then down in verse 12 Jesus says, *"...when you go into a household, greet it. If the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it."* Ok just hold that thought for a moment while I take you all the way back to Noah:

“He (Noah) sent out from himself a dove, to see if the waters had receded from the face of the ground. But the dove found no resting place for the sole of her foot, and she returned into the ark to him, for the waters were on the face of the whole earth. So he put out his hand and took her, and drew her into the ark to himself. And he waited yet another seven days, and again he sent the dove out from the ark. Then the dove came to him in the evening, and behold, a freshly plucked olive leaf was in her mouth; and Noah knew that the waters had receded from the earth. So he waited yet another seven days and sent out the dove, which did not return again to him anymore.”

(Genesis 8:8-12)

What is the international sign of peace? A dove with an olive branch in its mouth, right? Fascinating. In what form did the Holy Spirit descend and rest upon Jesus at His baptism? A dove, right? Fascinating. The Old Testament story of Noah and the dove is a prophetic picture of New Testament ministry.

Jesus said we are to go into a house and release peace there. Luke’s gospel says that if there is nobody in that house worthy to receive that peace, then that dove, that peace will return to you like it did to Noah. The point is, you and I are ministers of a Person. We have more than words, more than a message, more than a concept, more than a spiritual argument to give to people – we have a Person resting upon us and residing within us Who longs to be released into the environment in which God has placed us.

What was it that was drawn from Jesus when the woman touched His garment and He felt power move from Him? What was it that was drawn from Jesus in town after town over those three and half years of intense ministry? It was the person of the Holy Spirit – given to us without measure, without limitation to impart to any and all who receive Him. That is the normal Christian life! That is why we are here! To advance the kingdom of heaven, by God’s grace, for God’s glory and through God’s Spirit. Take a look at John 20:19-22. This is after the resurrection.

“Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

Remember what Jesus taught them to do when they entered a house? *‘Let your peace come upon it.’* Well this is where I think they finally understood what He was talking about.

“When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. So Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

What happened here? Jesus walked into a room full of fearful believers and released the peace of another world in the Person of the Holy Spirit.

Brothers and sisters, you and I are called to walk into a world full of fearful people and bring peace. Right now we need a generation of people who can walk into a room, into a community, into a city and a nation and bring the hope, healing and reality of another world through the person of the Holy Spirit. Jesus walked into that room and said *“Peace”* and they didn’t receive it at first because they were fearful - some guy who was dead just walked through a closed door! So He said it again and His words became Spirit and He imparted a Person to them ... not a hollow platitude or a powerless blessing. Is any of this making sense to you? I pray that it is because all ministry involves us learning to cooperate with the Holy Spirit and then to impart Him to others.

Do you remember in Noah's story that the dove flew around looking for a place to land? Do you understand that the Holy Spirit is always looking for a resting place in another person? He is always looking for someone to rest upon and help bring that person their purpose in life.

The Christian life is not that complicated. It has always been about the partnership between heaven and earth so that the purposes and will of heaven would be displayed and manifested on earth. That is why Jesus asked us to pray and believe it will be answered: *"Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."* Our purpose as a church has always been to advance the Kingdom of heaven, by God's grace, for God's glory and through God's Spirit – and that Spirit has been given to every single believer in this place, freely and without measure or limitation.

Every morning as you rise from your slumber you have a choice: You can ignore, quench or grieve the Holy Spirit within you ... or you can submit to Him, walk in His power and impart Him to those around you throughout that day – wherever you go. It will be that choice, made each and every day by each and every one of us which will determine if we are *being the Church* that Jesus is building – that Church which will finally bring this world to its knees in worship, adoration and submission before the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

If you really want to stop just 'going to Church' and start truly 'being the Church' then what I have shared with you here is non-negotiable! As Zechariah wrote thousands of years ago, *"Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the Lord Almighty.*" (Zechariah 4:6)