

Sermon

Sunday, June 9, 2019

Charleston, SC

8:00 am & 10:30 am Sermon ~ Judges 13:24-14:6a, Psalm 104, Acts 2:1-11, John 20:19-23

Empowered to Empower

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He's a questionable guy at best! A maverick, a one man army, driven by animal instincts for women and revenge. He's a womanizing, narcissistic, big-haired hot-head. Yes, we probably know his story. How he marries twice into Philistine families. How both marriages end in disaster. How he loves riddles no one could solve. How he loses his strength when his hair is cut off. How, with one last bit of strength, he pushes on temple pillars and it all comes down collapsing on himself and others. His life? Over.

I'm talking about Samson. A violent bull in a china shop. His death is normally where Samson's story ends. But on this Pentecost Sunday, there are two things you may not know about this man. First, God uses even violent, womanizing narcissists for his purpose. In fact, it would be through Samson that Israel would receive the beginnings of her freedom from the Philistines, known now as modern day Palestine, that would transform future generations. God uses broken people.

But second, Samson's strength came from the Holy Spirit. Twice in just the few verses from Judges, we find it was the Holy Spirit that gave Samson his strength. This is important because on this Pentecost Sunday, it's very easy to think the Holy Spirit is a 1970's kind of a fringe teaching invented by some wacky people in the church. Or something too mysterious to get our minds around because in some circles He's called The Holy Ghost! But clearly, the Holy Spirit was not invented by the Church, because the Holy Spirit was introduced even before Samson, on day one of creation! Genesis Chapter 1 verse 1: The Holy Spirit hovered over Creation! The Holy Spirit brought order out of chaos, and still does. When God created humans, he formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. Talk about Supernatural! So, yes the Holy Spirit has been around since day one, and continued to do amazing things in the Old Testament, i-e, coming upon particular leaders like David, Gideon and Samson to give supernatural strength. But in the New Testament, and with the coming of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit's

power goes to a whole 'nother level. This is why Acts 2 is so radical!

Quick time out for a history lesson. Two of the most important Jewish festivals are Passover and Pentecost or Shavuot. The Passover Feast was the festival celebrating the lamb's blood on doors that prevented the angel of death from killing their first born children. The angel of death was forced to pass-over the door of the Jews, and only afflict the Egyptian children. Pentecost for the Jews happened 50 days after that Pass-over.

Pente means fifty. Pentecost celebrated, among other things, the provision of the wheat and barley harvest! For the Christian, these holidays mean different things. Passover is Easter! Where through the blood of Jesus on the door of our hearts, the angel of death is defeated. It means we will never die! We will go on to live in eternity. Pente-Cost, 50 days after the Resurrection, celebrates the provision not of wheat and barley to sustain, but the Power of the Holy Spirit to sustain! Jesus Christ provides and sustains all his people by providing the Holy Spirit for everyone!

This is how it happens. In Acts 2, a loud, violent, and supernatural wind blows through the whole house where the disciples were staying. A big ball of fire appears, then splits and rests on each person, all of them are filled with the spirit and each of them began speaking the language of God! That's Christian Pentecost!

My Friends, I want to spend the remainder of my time in this sermon to explain the three ways the Holy Spirit transforms our lives. First, the Holy Spirit transforms our lives by giving us an intimacy with the Father. John 16: The Holy Spirit will teach you all things and help you remember my love for you. Don't be afraid.

When you remember the love someone has for you, what happens? It creates intimacy. When I remember the love my parents have for me, it brings a beautiful warmth. When I remember the love my wife has for me, it brings about a beautiful intimacy. The Holy

Spirit makes our experience of Jesus Christ intimate by helping us remember the Love Jesus has for us. When we call on the Holy Spirit we're given warmth, friendship, and intimacy with Jesus. In my own life I find that when I pray "Jesus Christ, fill me through your Holy Spirit and equip me for what you have for me today," it is then I experience his warmth, that love, that voice that says: "I believe in you." A warmth that burns away the coldness of my heart, my cynicism, my doubt. Jesus, through your Holy Spirit, breathe a new life of intimacy in me.

So, this is no impersonal spirit. It's not me saying I'm just a spiritual guy. No, the Holy Spirit's job is to draw me into that intimacy exclusively with Jesus! As that great English preacher Charles Spurgeon said, "I looked to Christ and the Holy Spirit flew in. I looked to the Spirit only and Jesus Disappeared." The Holy Spirit is attached to Jesus, His Messiahship. It's supernatural, but again, it's in the language of prayer. I urge you today in this season of Pentecost to pray: Lord Jesus, through your Holy Spirit, warm me to your love

So, the Holy Spirit brings Intimacy, but the Holy Spirit also brings raw Power, that is both inward and outward! The heart of Pentecost is power for ministry. Not the power of a magician, but a deep INNER power. In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit comes on people like Samson to increase their strength to do things like snap the ropes that bind them so they can take down enemies. But in the New Testament, the power of the Holy Spirit works from the inside out. Judges Chapter 15 verse 14 says the Spirit of God came on Samson in power, the ropes became like charred flax and dropped from his hands.

In the New Testament, and in our day, we may not be bound by ropes, but we might be tied down by the ethereal ropes of fears, unforgiveness, regrets, destructive habits, or additions that take over our lives and kill us from the inside out. I know this because of our Gospel passage for today. John 20, it's the late afternoon of the same day Jesus was resurrected. The doors were shut where they were because the disciples didn't know Jesus had been resurrected, and they believe the next

knock on the door would be mobs of people trying to kill them. Yet Jesus supernaturally appears before them. To their terrified hearts and disbelief, Jesus says, have peace. And then as if re-creating Genesis 1, where God breathes over creation, Jesus breathes on the disciples saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit." For what? For spiritual inward power. Jesus breathes on them saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive, they won't be forgiven." This power of the Holy Spirit transforms us beginning with our insides, setting us free from unforgiveness, anger, and sin.

Now, I know that sometimes we leave church with the conviction that I really need to forgive that person, or I need to be more patient. But without the power of Holy Spirit, it's impossible! It like getting into a car with no gas and saying let's go. The Holy Spirit is our fuel, that enables us to change and be changed from our insides, into the image of Christ.

I love the story of a man in Glasgow, Kentucky. Les Puckett, after struggling to start his car, lifts the hood and discovers to his absolute shock that someone had stolen his engine!

Back to Spurgeon who said, "without the Spirit of God we can do nothing. We are like ships without wind, chariots without horses, branches without sap, coals without fire." The Holy Spirit is our power in the everyday to love, and be loved, to forgive and be forgiven! But also power to fuel our gifts in ministry! If we have the gift of teaching, the Holy Spirit is there to take our teaching to another level. If we have the gift of prophecy, the Holy Spirit is there to take our gift to another level. The gift of singing, or writing, the Holy Spirit gives us a new spirit of creativity and power! And this is critical because if we're trying to empower others in our family, others in our ministry, and others in the world, we have to ask ourselves, "Have we been empowered by the Holy Spirit to empower others?" We can't empower others unless we are first supernaturally empowered! We can't give what we don't have. My friends, if you are here this morning tired, worn out from a long season, dry on your insides, your intimacy with Jesus waning, and power depleted. It's time to extend our hands and palms in what should be daily prayer, praying, "Jesus, through the Power of your Holy Spirit, bring back that precious intimacy. Revive my insides with power, vitality, and vision." This intimacy, this power, is Pentecost.

But it's even more than that. The Holy Spirit transforms our life in one more way. Believe it or not, the Holy Spirit is given to convict us of our sin. To reveal where in our life we are going in the wrong direction, to reveal where we are missing the mark. Not to condemn us, but to restore that intimacy with the Jesus. I was saying to one of our parishioners last

week, it's the role of the spirit to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. The Holy Spirit is so powerful that He might even rend your life power-less until that sin is confessed and forgiven. Again, not because God wants to condemn you, but because He wants to restore you to the most profound intimacy with Him. We can't sin and simultaneously experience his intimacy and power. God hates sin to the point that he will sometimes remove that intimacy and power, and convict us of our sin, so we might return to Him and be filled with that power once again.

The Holy Spirit is a life changer my friends. He brings us intimacy with Jesus. He brings us power to be forever changed from the inside, and through conviction turns us toward Him. My friends, remember, The Holy Spirit is for everyone. Not just the Samsons, Pauls, and super Christians, the Holy Spirit is for everyone! How do I know? Later in Acts 2, we're told the Holy Spirit was causing such a ruckus, that people on the outside were demanding, what's going on? Peter says repent, be baptized, everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise is for you and your children and all who are far off.

Pentecost: Intimacy. Power from the inside out. Conviction. Required for every believer.

Finally this morning. Dwight Moody, that 19th century author and preacher said, "You might as well try to see without eyes, hear without ears, or breathe without lungs as to try and live the Christian life without the Holy Spirit." Years after he wrote this, Moody was about to preach in London. A senior official in the church there protests, saying, "Why do we need this 'Mr. Moody'? He's uneducated, inexperienced, and too young. Who does he think he is anyway? Does he think he has a monopoly on the Holy Spirit?" At that, a Pastor sitting next to him stands up and says, "With all due respect, no, DL Moody does not have a monopoly on the Holy Spirit. But, the Holy Spirit has a monopoly on Mr. Moody."

My friends, envision leaving here today filled, saturated, and soaked in the intimacy and Power of the Holy Spirit. Empowered by the Spirit, to empower the world. Let us pray.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, through your Holy Spirit fall on each of us, rain down like the mightiest spring rain, like the gentle dew, just saturate us that we might live intimately with you, and with great power.