

John on Jesus - The Holy Spirit in Action

July 21, 2013

Good morning Faith Church. Thank you for allowing me time off. We visited some friends in Michigan for a few days then spent most of our vacation at my parents' house in Philadelphia. If you received my e-mail about baptism, you know we also made it to Ocean City, New Jersey, where we put our feet in the Atlantic Ocean.

While I was gone, like many people are each week, I was actually present in both services as I watched Pastor Leland and Pastor Jordan teach on the live-stream feed on our website. They did a great job. You can see why I am so excited to have Jordan on staff, and I know he will be a great blessing to the new Spencer campus.

This morning, we return to our studies in the Gospel of John. We are in John 16:5-16. That is page 902 in the pew Bible. If you don't have a pew Bible, that means somebody stole it. If they are desperate enough to steal it, they can keep it. I am not pressing charges. This section of John is called the Upper Room Discourse. These were Jesus' final instructions to his disciples before he went to the cross.

These particular verses talk about the Holy Spirit. They are some of the final verses in the Gospel of John on the Holy Spirit. This week, as I was studying these verses, I realized there is not enough here for a whole sermon. I didn't know what to do. As I was reflecting on this, I remembered a conversation I had with Dan Foote a few weeks ago after I preached on the Holy Spirit from an

earlier section in the Gospel. He said, “The Gospel of John has good teaching on the Holy Spirit, the problem is that it isn’t in one place but it is scattered throughout the book.” I thought it might be good for us to review some of what we learned on the Holy Spirit earlier in the book and stitch it together, to create a sermon that is a one-stop-shop on the Holy Spirit from the Gospel of John.

I got out my Logos Bible software and did a search on the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of John and found out the Holy Spirit is talk about 10 times. I thought, this will be easy, a 10-point sermon. Then I reconsidered because if I gave you that big of a sermon, you would put me on the grill at the church picnic this afternoon instead of the hamburgers. That isn’t the way I want to end my vacation.

Instead of all 10, I decided we would just take five important sections from John and look at them, the last one being our passage today. I found I really enjoyed this study. It taught me what it looks like when the Holy Spirit is in action in our lives. This fly-over study will do us immense good when it comes to understanding more of the Holy Spirit and how he works. Let’s jump in with our first passage.

John 3:4-8 - The Holy Spirit makes us Christians.

Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”
John 3:4–8 (ESV)

One of the first things we learn about the Holy Spirit in this Gospel comes from Jesus' discussion with Nicodemus about how God works in a life.

Nicodemus was an elite member of the Jews. He was a member of the hard-core Pharisees. This was elite sect of men super-committed to following God. It was such an elite group that there never existed more than 6,000 at a time on the planet because so few men are hard-core enough to be part of it. These guys memorized the entire Old Testament. Hard-core. We think somebody is hard-core if they wear a Christian T-shirt to school. These guys wore a box strapped to their foreheads. In the box, they put Bible verses. When the Old Testament says to bind the words of God to your forehead, they didn't just take that for the metaphor it was about memorizing Bible verses. They took it literally! In addition to being super smart, Nicodemus was super powerful. He was also a member of the Jewish ruling counsel. These were the 70 men who ruled the nation. In addition, Nicodemus was described as "the" teacher of Israel. He was the guy everybody wanted to study under. Nicodemus was sharp as a tack, but in this discussion, he was dense as a rock.

Nicodemus asked Jesus what it takes for somebody to be part of God's kingdom. Nicodemus was part of the Avis club, he couldn't try much harder. Jesus gave him an answer that hit him like a sucker punch on the chin. Being part of God's kingdom doesn't happen when people memorize the Bible. You aren't guaranteed to be part of God's kingdom by a clean driving record. Jesus told Nicodemus the only way he, or anyone, will be part of God's kingdom is if they are born again.

Nicodemus, who was the premiere intellect of his day, has nothing register in his grey matter when it came to understanding what Jesus was talking about. Nicodemus thought the born again experience meant re-entry into his mom. If that is what it meant, I am sure his mom would never let him experience it. What did Jesus mean when he said we must be born again?

Just as our physical birth was not something we chose, being born again is not something we choose. Being born again happens when God's Holy Spirit starts working in our hearts. The Holy Spirit comes into our lives, and he softens us to the things of God. He gives us eyes to see our sin. He gives us the ability to see Christ as God's son. We eventually come to the point where we trust in Jesus' death on the cross to save us from our sins; the only reason we desire to choose Christ is because the Holy Spirit is working in our lives to open the eyes of our hearts. The moment we trust in Christ's death to save us from our sins, we are born again. Ultimately, the born-again experience is not something we choose or start. It is something the Holy Spirit does in our hearts.

How do we know if somebody experienced this? Do they break out in acne? Does their hair stand on end like they stuck their tongue in a light socket? When we are born again, everything changes in our lives. We become completely new people. Instead of loving sin and being addicted to it, people who are born again delight in God more than anything; they love Jesus for his grace they don't deserve. Holiness becomes the desire and pattern of their lives. God worked in their lives through his Holy Spirit. He changed them. It is like the wind. You can't see the wind, but you can see the effects of the wind.

In the town I grew up, because everything was close, they didn't bus kids to school. Everybody walked. On my route to middle school was the house of a kid named John. Since his house was on my way to school, in the fall of my sixth-grade year, we occasionally walked together. Then things changed. He started hanging with a different crowd. He let his hair grow long. He usually smoked cigarettes on his way to school. He looked like he was smoking the funny short ones. This wasn't the right reaction but all I could think of when he was walking near me on the sidewalk was that he was the kind of person my mother warned me about. Stay away!

I went to college and went to seminary. When I came home to visit my parents, they told me there was a new guy in church who was my age. I would probably remember him from school. His name was John. It was the same guy. One rainy Sunday night, we went out to a pizza parlor to grab a slice and catch up. He was a totally different guy. Somebody explained to him about Jesus, and it clicked. He started reading his Bible and over the next few months of going to church and Bible study, he totally changed. When we met, he was helping the local high school kids in the Young Life club. He went on to become the leader of the organization.

Where did this change come from? Did he just get up one day and decide he wanted to be different? Absolutely not! The Holy Spirit began working in him to enable him to see his sins, to see Jesus and to trust in Jesus. There came a time when he crossed the line and repented of his sins and trusted in Jesus. He

was born again. Who made the change? The Holy Spirit. That is the Holy Spirit in action.

John 4:23-24 - The Holy Spirit leads us in true worship.

But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”
John 4:23–24 (ESV)

In this section of John, Jesus met a Samaritan woman. The Samaritans were rejected by the Jews and this lady was at the bottom of the social scale. She was rejected by the Samaritans. She was social plankton. As Jesus had a conversation with her, he put his finger on a sore subject in her life — men! This lady was going through men faster than junior highers change their socks. She already had five husbands, and she was then living with a man who was not her husband. Attempting to change the subject off of her failed relational world, she talked about worship. You see the Samaritans worshipped on Mt. Gerazim, where they had built a rival temple to the one found in Jerusalem. The big discussion of the day was, “Where should we worship? Can we worship on Mt. Gerazim or do we have to worship in Jerusalem with the Jews that hate us?”

This Samaritan lady figured this was her shot to get that question answered once-and-for-all. Jesus threw another left hook and told her that a new time had arrived. It doesn’t matter where you worship. The temple is passé. It is like listening to music on cassette tape. It is now a thing of the past. The Holy Spirit now enables us to have true worship which is from our hearts, not from a building.

Many times, you can tell on Sunday who has the Holy Spirit working in their hearts during worship. You can see it on their faces when they sing. When we sing songs of praise and adoration to Jesus for what he has done in our lives, you can see on people's face when the words of the songs are resonating with the experiences of Jesus they have in their hearts. What is happening when our hearts are resonating with the words of worship is they give form to the experience of God we have in our hearts. It is the Holy Spirit enabling us to worship in our lives!

John 7:37-39 - The Holy Spirit is a guarantee from God that we know him.

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "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. John 7:37–39 (ESV)

We live at a privileged point in history. We can experience the Holy Spirit in a way the Old Testament saints could not. The Holy Spirit was present in the Old Testament. We see him in Genesis hovering over the face of the waters in creation. We see him empowering different Old Testament saints like Joshua, Moses and David. We even see him giving special skills to craftsmen that helped them fashion the temple in the Old Testament.

It seems that in the Old Testament, the Spirit of the Lord came upon people for special tasks, but occasionally he departed. Look how the Holy Spirit came upon King Saul.

When he turned his back to leave Samuel, God gave him another heart. And all these signs came to pass that day. When they came to Gibeah, behold, a group of prophets met him, and the Spirit of God rushed upon him, and he prophesied

among them. And when all who knew him previously saw how he prophesied with the prophets, the people said to one another, “What has come over the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?” 1 Samuel 10:9–11 (ESV)

Here we read how God’s spirit came upon Saul and he prophesied. It didn’t stay that way. After Saul chose to sin, God rejected him as king. Look what happened.

Now the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and a harmful spirit from the Lord tormented him. 1 Samuel 16:14 (ESV)

This is why, in Psalm 51, after David’s sin with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah, we find him asking that God wouldn’t take his spirit from him.

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Psalm 51:10–11 (ESV)

David was afraid he would face the same fate as Saul, where God withdrew his Spirit’s presence. That may be the way the Holy Spirit worked in the Old Testament, but that is not the way he works now.

What we find is when Christ returned to God the Father, the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit upon Christians in a new and unprecedented way. This began on the day of Pentecost in Acts when Peter and the disciples were transformed by the Holy Spirit. They were even given the ability to speak other languages by the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit didn’t just come upon them *powerfully*, but he also came upon them *permanently*. Today, the Holy Spirit is described as the seal, the permanent presence from God that guarantees we know God.

...and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. 2 Corinthians 1:22 (ESV)

So if we know Christ, the Holy Spirit is in our hearts permanently. He doesn't just come upon us for a particular task, like he did in the Old Testament. He won't leave us when we sin. He is in us and with us permanently, guaranteed. We may grieve the Holy Spirit but the word God began in us he will be faithful to complete.

This brings us to one of the songs we sing in church, which is Psalm 51. When we sing that song, one of the lines is, "Restore unto me, the joy of my salvation, and *take not your Holy Spirit from me.*" That may be Scripture, but that was Old Testament. The Holy Spirit's presence is now our seal. He will not be taken from us. I don't think we should sing Psalm 51 or if we do, make sure we change that line to reflect the fact we live in a new and exciting time of history where the Holy Spirit is upon us with a permanence and power that the Old Testament saints never knew.

John 14:15 - The Holy Spirit is our counselor.

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. John 14:16–17 (ESV)

When Jesus was on planet Earth and the disciples needed somebody to talk to who could help them think things through, they talked with Jesus. I am confident Jesus' advice was always good as gold. When Jesus was gone, who did the apostles turn to? Who should we turn to? The answer is the Holy Spirit. He is sent from the Father and the Son. He dwells with us and in us as Christians. He is described as another helper, or some translations call him another counselor. When we don't know the right thing to do, when we are at our

wits' end, get on our knees, talk to God and listen to the Holy Spirit in your heart. He is there. He may not lead us instantly but he will lead us. That is his job. He helps us know the right choices to please God in our lives. He helps us navigate tough decisions.

I see this all the time in marital counseling. I get a husband and wife in my office and they are fighting like cats having a scratching contest. I am diving under my desk to not get hurt. If I am thinking clearly, what is the right thing to do? Blow a ref's whistle and tell the couple to stop and take the next five minutes to silently pray, asking the Holy Spirit to prompt them on what they should do.

It is amazing what usually happens. When the Holy Spirit is working in a husband he will come back from prayer and say to his wife, "I was a jerk. The Holy Spirit showed me I was wrong. I asked Christ to forgive me. Will you please forgive me?" The wife then turns to her husband and says, "I was a jerk too. I shouldn't have treated you the way I did. The Holy Spirit showed me my sin. Will you forgive me?" Now you have another fight but they are fighting over who can be more repentant. Who turned the tables? The Holy Spirit.

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. John 14:26 (ESV)

Not only does the Holy Spirit counsel us, but when we read our Bibles, he brings to our remembrance what Christ said and did. He helps us apply that to our lives.

Read God's Word. Either while you are reading it, or later in the day, you will have what you learned in your Bible pop into your head and connect to your life. Where does that come from? That is the Holy Spirit working in our lives.

John 16:5-11 - The Holy Spirit brings conviction of sin.

But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, "Where are you going?" But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. John 16:5-11 (ESV)

This brings us to this morning's text. How many of you followed the George Zimmerman and Trayvon Martin case? This past week, while at my parents', Mom and Dad were glued to the television. There was good family discussion over who was guilty and what the outcome should be. In the end, there was not enough evidence of a crime for the prosecuting attorney to convict George Zimmerman of a crime.

Here we learn what the Holy Spirit does for the world. He acts like a prosecuting attorney that presents evidence to our minds that will bring a conviction. When we sin, it is the Holy Spirit that makes us feel guilty, dirty, and far from God. That is the Holy Spirit at work.

The other job he does is he convicts us of Christ's righteousness. He witnesses in our hearts that God is perfect and we are disgusting. He is the one who helps us sense how far we are from God.

He also convicts us of the reality of judgment. This is why people carry an incredible sense of guilt around for years because of unforgiven sin. They know judgment is coming. They don't know how they will face it because they know they are not forgiven. The Holy Spirit hangs lingering guilt on their hearts like meat on a hook. That is the Holy Spirit leading people to conviction of their sins. While nobody likes feeling dirty from their sins, sensing the righteousness of God having that lingering sense of judgment to come, this convicting power of the Holy Spirit is a good thing. It is what the Holy Spirit uses to lead us to Christ.

Remember what happened in Acts 2, when Peter stood up and preached on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit empowered Peter to preach. This is the outpouring of the Spirit of God that Jesus talked about in John 7. If Peter preached the *exact same sermon* one day before the coming of the Holy Spirit, nothing would have happened. In Acts it tells us the Holy Spirit was not just at work in Peter's preaching but he was at work in Peter's audience giving people great conviction of their sins.

This is so important for us to know when it comes to sharing Christ with our friends and neighbors. From time to time our friends and neighbors will share their struggles. They might share about their sense of guilt or lingering shame. They might share about their struggles and failures. This is good stuff. It means the Holy Spirit is working in their hearts. He is driving them to Jesus. God is tilling their hearts. It is our job to share the Gospel with them, just like Peter did with his audience on the day of Pentecost.

Conclusion

Sometimes we read about ways the Holy Spirit occasionally worked in the early church with people speaking in tongues and prophesying, and all that sounds exciting. Then we look at our lives, and those supernatural experiences are missing. We start to wonder if the Holy Spirit is active in our lives at all. Then we come to the Gospel of John and we get a different picture.

- If we can see our sins and see how Jesus is the only way to save us from our sins, that is because the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives.
- If in worship there is something different that goes on where the words of the songs form the expression of gratitude in your heart to Christ, that is because the Holy Spirit is at work.
- If during times of doubt, anger and confusion, you have come to God in prayer and found the teaching of Christ coming to your mind and sensed how God will lead you, that is the Holy Spirit at work.

As I close a sermon, I ask God how he wants us to respond. There are two appropriate responses this morning. If you have not trusted Christ and the Holy Spirit is showing you your sins and what Christ has done for you, ask Jesus to be your savior today.

For those of us who know Christ, the appropriate response is to thank God for sending us the Holy Spirit, for not leaving us alone, for saving us and giving us the ability to worship God.

Pray

Jesus, thank you for the Holy Spirit. We just want to confess how ignorant we often are to your work in our lives. We thank you for sending the Holy Spirit and

not leaving us alone. We thank you we are in this privileged time in history where the Holy Spirit is at work powerfully and permanently in our lives as your children. Thank you for sending the Holy Spirit to make us feel bad, to help us to see our sin, the righteousness of God and the judgment to come. Thank you for sending the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to see Jesus, because apart from the Holy Spirit in our lives, we would be completely blind to all you have done for us. So as we close, we just want to thank you for not leaving us alone, for your spirit being with us and guiding us forever. We just want to acknowledge how thankful we are for the Holy Spirit and the ordinary ways we need him to have any spiritual life. Amen.

Amen.



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