

WHY I'M NOT AFRAID OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

JOHN 20:19-23

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."

Now 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..."

Like frightened deer, like scared rabbits, the disciples bounded from the garden. In their case, the Garden of Gethsemane. They were scurrying for their very lives.

All of Jesus' men succumbed to fear. They all took flight. None of them had the courage to stand by Jesus in the face of the angry mob from the Temple.

One author puts it, "The only thing that was moving faster than their feet was their pulse rate... Words of loyalty and commitment were left behind in a cloud of dust." But as we learned last week, all of the disciples, *except Judas*, came back. Everyone of them returned.

And by the time we get to Sunday evening, all eleven disciples had wandered back to the upper room.

They were defeated and discouraged... Their weaknesses had been revealed - their boastful claims obliterated... They

were embarrassed and ashamed... **They were far from intact... they were just back.**

But apparently, that's all that mattered to Jesus. The risen Lord Jesus is able to forgive us, and fix us, and make us fit for His kingdom. He specializes in reclamation projects. *Our part is to simply come back...* to trust Him enough to step over our guilt, and failure, and condemnation - and come back to Him...

We know that was the resurrected Jesus' attitude toward the disciples because He walked right through the walls of that barricaded room, and greeted them warmly. He didn't speak condemning words like, *"I told you so..."*, or *"How could you..."*, or *"I'm done with you."* Jesus met them with uplifting and healing words.

He walked right passed a bolted door and shut windows - *symbols of their doubts and fears* - and appeared in their midst, saying, *"Peace be with you."*

Since the disciples had faith enough to come back, Jesus came to them with peace. It was a new start!

In fact, the disciples could barely believe what they'd heard - perhaps that's why Jesus repeated Himself. In verse 21, He says a second time, *"Peace to you!"*

And notice the exclamation point! Jesus was the victim of their denial and betrayal, but here He takes the initiative. He's the one working to persuade and convince the disciples of His love for them.

And to complete their restoration, He goes beyond just acceptance. He let's these defeated disciples know that He

still has a purpose for their lives. He adds in verse 21, *“As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.”*

Peter denied Jesus *thrice* before the rooster crowed *twice* - a triple-decker defeat. Condemnation cubed...

I'm sure the reason Peter went fishing after the resurrection was he assumed it was his only option. *After what he'd done how could he ever be used by the Lord again?* But while he fished, Jesus appeared to him. On the beach, He re-called him to His service...

And again three times... the same number of times Peter denied Jesus... *three times, no less...* Jesus reaffirmed His desire to use Peter once more, *“Feed My lambs... Tend My sheep... Feed My sheep...”*

Peter's restoration began with God's forgiveness, but it climaxed with the assurance that even his colossal failure had not forfeited the possibility for Him to serve.

And that's what Jesus is wanting to say to all the disciples here in verse 21... *“Peace”... you can be pardoned. And “peace”... you can still be productive.*

The Pulpit Commentary explains it this way, *“The first “peace” gave to all who were assembled a new revelation; the second “peace”, a summons to service.”*

When the disciples staggered out of the shadows and returned to the upper room they were broken, and bleeding, and barely hanging on to their frail faith.

But when the risen Jesus appeared to them they were instantly restored and re-commissioned...

Perhaps, you too are a disciple of Jesus, and like the disciples on resurrection Sunday, *you're far from intact...* you're still reeling from embarrassing defeats and shameful acts... *but at least you've come back!...*

Yet just being back is not where Jesus wants your story to end. Now that you're back, He desires to send you out! Despite what you've done, you can still serve.

Jesus takes *shadow dwellers*, and *spiritual failures*, and calls us to be *the light of the world*. He reignites a fire in our hearts to bring Him glory. Yes, we're far from *intact...* but when we *come back*, Jesus changes us.

The risen Lord starts a transformation in our lives...

And this restoration is summed up in verse 22, **"Receive the Holy Spirit."** Everything God does in us and through us is done by the person of the Holy Spirit!

The Garden of Gethsemane was a total failure for the disciples. At first, they were too lazy to pray with Jesus... then they were afraid to stand for Jesus.

Yet Jesus' answer to the lethargy and cowardice that gripped the disciples was to give them the Holy Spirit. The gift of God's Spirit is indispensable for a believer.

Ultimately, God's answer to all our weaknesses and each of our shortcomings is His Spirit. As one author put it, **"The Holy Spirit is in office on earth, and all spiritual interaction with God comes through Him."**

Over the next couple of weeks I want to talk to you about the Holy Spirit... **This morning**, I want to explain to you **why**

I'm not afraid of the Holy Spirit, and why you shouldn't be either... Then **next Sunday**, I hope to convince you that **we all need the Holy Spirit**...

John 20:21-22 are truly marvelous words. They flow from the lips of our risen Lord to defeated disciples...

Jesus greets them with marvelous peace, and then imparts to them His Spirit. John writes, *"He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."*

When my son, Nick, was younger, I mentioned to him that he should go out for the wrestling team. I thought with his build and athleticism he'd make a champion wrestler. *Of course, He didn't like the idea...*

When Nick thought of the sport of wrestling all he could envision were *fat guys in tights, and sleeper holds, and Wrestle Mania*. In his mind he saw the fake, and the phony, and the hype - and wanted no part of it.

And with that as the model, I don't blame him. Professional *Wrassling* gives real *wrestling* a bad rap.

Wrasslin' is staged entertainment. It's *showmanship* not *substance*. It's *scripted outcomes* not *competitive effort*. To appreciate the sport of *wrestling* I needed to take my son to a real High School or College match, and let him witness a genuine wrestling event.

And this is how some folks respond when they hear of the Holy Spirit. They've seen the sideshows and abuses - *wrasslin not real wrestling*. And in response, **"they've thrown the baby out with the bathwater."**

I believe most Christians want a *deeper experience with God*, they just don't want to go off *the deep end*.

They need to receive the Holy Spirit, *but ignorance, or misconception, or fear* keeps them from opening up.

Here's what happens... We correctly assume the *Holy Spirit* will make us *more holy* and *more spiritual* - then we see folks supposedly under the sway of the Spirit acting *more carnal* and *less spiritual...*

I want to be *godly*, not *goofy!*... *I'm goofy enough as it is...* People get turned-off by the antics of folks who claim to be spiritual, while acting very unspiritual.

What's needed in churches today is a *genuine* out-pouring of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

Maybe you've watched Christian television and seen prima-donna preachers prancing across the stage blowing on people and slapping them on the forehead.

These guys create a hyped-up, emotionally-charged atmosphere, and *play it* to manipulate psychosomatic responses. *And does God ever come to these rallies?*

At times He does. I believe God can use anyone to minister to hurting people. God once used a donkey.

But when God's Spirit does come on the scene you can be sure it's because of a believer's genuine faith, not because of some preacher's flamboyant antics. He works more *despite them*, than *because of them*.

This is certainly not what happened between Jesus and His disciples that Sunday evening. Jesus doesn't woo the

disciples into some kind of hyper-emotional trance - he doesn't play on heightened anticipations.

These stunned disciples had felt dead inside for three days... Now, they can barely believe their eyes.

This is not *manipulation*, this is true *impartation*.

In John 14:17, on the night before He was crucified, Jesus spoke to His disciples in the same upper room of the Holy Spirit, “He dwells with you and will be in you.”

Up until this point the Spirit had been by their side.

But now that they've believed on the risen Christ, and met the requirements of salvation, the Holy Spirit now enters them, and takes up residence inside them.

Though Jesus will leave them physically He will forever be linked to His disciples spiritually. Jesus breathed on them, and transmitted into them His Spirit.

I love how Eugene Peterson paraphrases John 20:22, “Then (Jesus) took a deep breath and breathed into them. “Receive the Holy Spirit,” He said.”

Hey, “He took a deep breath”... Jesus drew from deep within, and gave them something of Himself...

There is no show or showmanship here. Jesus isn't puffed up with pride, or full of hot air. This isn't a case of *bad breath*. Jesus takes something from deep within Himself, and He puts it deep within His disciples. As the psalmist describes it, “deep calls unto deep.”

Jesus is forming a heart connection with His men.

What happened in John 20 is similar to what God did at the original creation. Genesis 2:7 tells us, “The LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.” God gave Adam the gift of life.

God transmitted the life that was in Him, and put it into the man.... And just as God transmitted *physical life* to Adam, here Jesus transmits *spiritual life* to His disciples. He breathes into them something of Himself.

Understand, what happened in the upper room when the disciples came back that Sunday evening was not *theatrics*, it was *theology* in the truest sense - *it was the study of God through the experience of God*.

Here, Jesus transmits His life, His nature, His love, His heart - *and as He told them, His peace* - to His disciples. The person of the Holy Spirit embodies all that Jesus was, and felt, and taught, and did...

Here is the primary reason why I'm not afraid of the Holy Spirit... **the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of our Lord!**

Everything Jesus began, He continued through the Holy Spirit. Philippians 1:19, Romans 8:9, 1 Peter 1:11 goes as far as to refer to the Holy Spirit as “the Spirit of Jesus,” or “the Spirit of Christ.” When I receive more of the Holy Spirit I open myself up to more of Jesus.

If you're drawn to Jesus - His love and forgiveness.

If you thirst for His joy, and peace, and acceptance.

If you find His ways winsome, and are intrigued by His power... If you're in hot pursuit of Jesus, you'll want the Holy

Spirit. For if you can trust in the ways and will of Jesus, then you can trust in His Holy Spirit.

In John 14:16 Jesus promised His disciples, “I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever - the Spirit of truth...” Jesus guaranteed them “*another Helper.*”

There are two Greek words that get translated by the same English word, “*another.*” One word means “another of a different kind.” But the word Jesus uses here is “another of the same kind.” The implication is that the Holy Spirit will be just like Jesus. God’s Spirit will help the disciples, just as Jesus had helped them.

Jesus calmed their storms... He turned their water to wine... He healed their sicknesses... Jesus multiplied their meager loaves and fish... He even said He would make them fishers of men... *He did all that and more...*

And now Jesus tells His befuddled disciples that the Holy Spirit is about to *take up* where He had *left off!*

Remember, the Son so closely reflected the Father in heaven, that Jesus was able to say to Philip, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father.” But likewise, the Holy Spirit so closely reflects Jesus that the Holy Spirit is referred to as “Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

Everything our Lord meant to His disciples He wants the Holy Spirit to mean to us. He expects us to depend on His Spirit, just as the disciples depended on Him.

A lot of people are afraid of the Holy Spirit because they fail to see the connection between the Holy Spirit and Jesus. They're attracted to Jesus in the Scripture, but they're not so sure about this ever-present Spirit.

I've experienced this firsthand. The Baptist church I grew up in was a good church. People feared God - the pastor preached Jesus - we all believed the Bible.

But the Holy Spirit was taboo. The subject *was off-limits*. Our pastor wouldn't touch Acts 2 with a ten foot pole. He would waltz around the subject of the power of the Spirit. He did more tippy-toeing than a ballerina.

Yet in Luke 11:13 Jesus said of the Holy Spirit, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

Notice, Jesus calls the Holy Spirit *a good gift!*

Sadly, for a long time, I wasn't quite sure if the Holy Spirit *was* a good gift. One of my former church's problems was the name we used for the Holy Spirit. We read from the Old King James version which referred to the Holy Spirit as the "*Holy Ghost*" - or as it came across to me, "*the Hoooo-lyyyyyy Ghoooo-st.*"

And right off the bat this caused some confusion. To me, the term "*Holy Ghost*" sounded eery, spooky, frightening. The best mental image I could conjure up for the Holy Ghost was Casper, the friendly ghost. I needed God's help - but you're *haunted by a ghost*.

Though I was brought up Baptist, as I got older my curiosity exposed me to some Pentecostal churches that put much more emphasis on the Holy Spirit - *but sadly, this only added to my already confused notions.*

Again, I loved Jesus. He was the consummate servant. He was the only truly sane person to ever walk this planet. Jesus lived a winsome, beautiful life.

Jesus was cool in every way... And when He saves people He makes them cool like Him. In Luke 8, when Jesus cast the legion of demons out of the crazed demoniac, the Bible says he was **“in his right mind.”**

But as I was being exposed to Charismatic circles, the stuff being done *in the name of the “Holy Ghost”* seemed odd and strange. It was as if folks had *lost their mind*, rather than restored to *their right mind*.

It reminded me of the little girl who knelt by her bed to pray at the end of a long day. She closed, **“I pray all these things in the name of the Father, Son, and...”**

Then she paused trying to remember Who it was that came next. Finally, she said ... **“and that other guy Who helps You out ... oh, yea, the Horsey Spirit.”**

Sadly though, when it comes to the Holy Spirit lots of people are *horsing around...* I'll tell you upfront, *I'm a charismatic. I've been baptized in the Spirit. I speak in tongues. I believe in supernatural gifts.* But I confess a lot of what goes on today, in the name of the *“Holy Ghost,”* is just plain weird - and worse, it's not biblical.

There is no mention in the Scripture of the Church *blowing on each other, or slaying folks in the Spirit... or barking like a dog... or laughing uncontrollably... or gold dust filling the air... or dental fillings turning into gold... etc, etc.* And when most people see such antics it only adds to their skittishness toward the Holy Spirit.

AW Tozer summarized the tragedy that's occurred, "Satan has opposed the doctrine of the Spirit-filled life about as bitterly as any other doctrine there is. He has confused it, and opposed it, and surrounded it with false notions and fears. He has blocked every effort of the Church of Christ to receive from the Father..."

If you've observed the fire of the Holy Spirit, but have been reluctant to get too close for fear of getting burned... then you need to listen to Jesus in Luke 11...

This is the chapter where our Lord Jesus calls the Holy Spirit *a good gift*... In verses 11-13 He asks His disciples three questions that have obvious answers, "If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone?" *Of course not*... "Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish?" *No way*... Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?" *What kind of a dad would do such a thing?*

And then Jesus draws His conclusion...

"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

Notice, the first of Jesus' three questions, "If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone?" A good dad would never give his nine month old a rock to chew on. The kid would break his teeth, or the stone would get stuck in his little throat.

Jesus is telling us, the Holy Spirit is not a stone in your mouth. He's not something that's weird - or out of place - or tasteless - or impossible for you to digest.

I don't believe for a second God's Spirit causes us to bark, or wallow, or flail away - *where did Jesus behave this way?* These kind of antics don't mimic Jesus.

A stone in your mouth isn't natural. It's an anomaly. It's out of place. Chances are it'll do more harm than good. A stone is something that's tough to swallow, whereas the Spirit is sweet and goes down smooth.

Notice, the second of Jesus' questions, "Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish?" Imagine, a kid asking for *fish*, and instead getting a *snake*. *What kind of a father would be that cruel?*

In the early church, the fish became a symbol for Christianity. The Greek word "fish" is "IXOYE" (*ichthus*). The fish became a code name for genuine Christian faith. When "ichthus" is treated as an acrostic the letters stand for "Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior."

The fish symbol was drawn by two sweeping lines that started at a common point and crossed at the tail.

Thus, when believers met one would sweep an arched line in the dirt. The person greeting him would sweep a line in the

other direction. Together they would draw a fish. It indicated they both were Christians.

The fish became a symbol for Christianity - whereas, from the Garden of Eden, throughout the Scriptures, the serpent has always been a symbol of Satan.

Growing up in a non-charismatic church we were taught that by opening yourself up to the Holy Spirit you might leave yourself vulnerable to evil spirits. You could be victimized by a demon. I can remember being told, "Be careful about opening up the door of your heart, and praying to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and seeking spiritual gifts - if you open yourself up, an evil spirit can slip in, and take up residence inside of you."

Over the years, as I've studied God's Word, I've concluded that this is one of the most blasphemous and wicked insults, a person can hurl at a loving God.

Here in our text, Jesus says, "*Not even an evil father would give his son a serpent if he asked for a fish - and God is better than the best earthly dad.*" Jesus is assuring us that God will never allow a person with a pure heart - sincerely seeking a bonafide Christian experience - to get hijacked by a demon. *Never!*

And notice the third question Jesus asks, "*Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?*" The egg speaks of new life - the scorpion the sting of death.

It would be another knock on the loving nature of our heavenly Father to think that He'd allow one of His kids to

seek life - or an egg - and instead, get the sting of a scorpion.
What kind of a Father do you think God is?

When Jesus breathed on His disciples, and said, “**Receive the Holy Spirit**”, remember they were out of breath. They’d been running. They were gasping for air. They were suffocating under a cloud of doubt.

Spiritually, they needed the oxygen of heaven.

But now the breath of Jesus and the impartation of His Spirit, fills them with new life. This experience put fresh wind back into the disciples’ sagging sails.

The Holy Spirit isn’t a stone, or serpent, or scorpion. He’s the bread that satisfies our hungry - the fish that gets multiple to meet our needs - the egg that begins new life. *He’s a good gift!* With these three questions in Luke 11 Jesus dispels our fears about the Holy Spirit...

I use to have a T-shirt I wore for years. My kids bought it for me. “**World’s #1 Dad**” - but it wasn't true.

That T-shirt actually belonged to God! He really is the #1 Dad. Jesus gives good gifts, and He’s reserved the best gift for His kids - the power of the Holy Spirit.

Since the Holy Spirit is *the Spirit of Jesus* - then to know Jesus, and walk with Jesus, and experience the power of Jesus - you cannot be afraid of His Spirit.

This is why Jesus took a deep breath, *and from inside Him to inside them*, He imparted His nature

He said to His men, “**Receive the Holy Spirit.**”

When we become a Christian we receive the Holy Spirit, but Jesus is talking about more than a one time reception. He's speaking of an attitude. On an ongoing basis Jesus expects us to be *receptive* to His Spirit.

When I looked up the Greek word that's translated "receive" I found several definitions that all illustrate the posture we should have toward the Holy Spirit...

Here's one, "to lay hold of" - let's embrace the Holy Spirit. Rather than shy away from spiritual things, we need *to be open to* and *in hot pursuit of* the Holy Spirit.

Here's another definition, "take in order to carry away" - our objective should be to carry the Holy Spirit and His influence with us into our everyday world.

Or this meaning, "claim for oneself" - this suggests we cultivate a personal trust and intimacy with the Holy Spirit. As the disciples considered Jesus their closest friend, we should feel the same about His Holy Spirit.

Here's another definition, "when that which is taken is not let go," literally "to clutch onto" - Rather than a passing fancy, our relationship with the Spirit should be a permanent pursuit. We should *live* in the Spirit.

And the final definition is "to choose." To receive the Holy Spirit is to make a choice. *Will I depend upon my own resources, or draw on this spiritual connection?*

Will I receive the Holy Spirit?

Here's my purpose this morning... I want us all to see the Holy Spirit as our ally, our friend! The disciples were *just back*

- they were far from *intact*... they were still hurting, bleeding, discouraged, and defeated... But Jesus breathed on them, and said to them, **“Receive the Holy Spirit.”** *This was His solution to their failures.*

If life has punched you in the gut?... If it's knocked the breath out of you?... If you're desperately in need of help... Jesus says to you, **“Receive the Holy Spirit.”**

Fifty years ago Christian singer Andre Crouch sang these words, **“Jesus is the answer for the world today. Above Him there's no other. Jesus is the way.”**

And his words are as true today as they were then. No matter the question, ultimately the answer is Jesus.

But to know Jesus powerfully you can't be afraid of His Holy Spirit. It's a true statement, **“He who does not know God the Holy Spirit does not know God at all.”**

It's the Holy Spirit who puts back together our broken pieces. **The work that Jesus started for us, the Holy Spirit now carries on in us.** He makes us holy!

You will never fulfill God's purpose for your Christian life, unless you embrace and receive the Holy Spirit.

It's been said, **“I need Jesus for my *eternal* life. Whereas, I need the Holy Spirit for my *internal* life.”**

Like the disciples you've come back to Jesus, *and that's good* - but for a broken heart and a shattered life to become intact... you need to receive the Holy Spirit.

Let me close with a story about the great missionary to China, Hudson Taylor. He was onboard a sailing ship bound

for China when the boat lost its wind and began drifting perilously close to the cannibal islands.

The captain didn't want to be on the native's menu that night - *fresh catch of the day at the Cannibal cafe*'. He asked Taylor to pray for God to send a strong wind.

Taylor said he would be happy to pray, just as soon as the captain raised the ship's sails. *Why ask God for a wind if the Captain had no faith?* Of course, in the absence of a breeze the captain thought it was foolish to hoist his sails. *Why raise my sails without a wind?*

The stalemate was finally broken when the stubborn Captain hoisted his sails... Hudson Taylor prayed, and God sent the wind! *And the moral of the story is clear...*

Don't expect Jesus to breathe His Spirit on you, if you're not willing to be open and receptive to Him...

There is no reason for us to fear the Holy Spirit in our lives. If you trust in Jesus, you can trust in His Spirit.

Peace comes to restless disciples... and defeated disciples become useful... when Jesus breathes on His followers, and says to them, **"Receive the Holy Spirit."**

And they obey...