

INTRODUCTION

I've got to confess that I don't like wearing a mask in public. But I do it because I believe I'm protecting others. I think masks are going to be around for a while. Since SARS hit Asia in 2002, many people there have been wearing masks in public. I can remember on my mission trips there seeing so many masks and wondering, "Wow, that looks strange." But that's probably one reason why Asian countries (besides China) have been mostly untouched by Covid. For instance, Taiwan has a population of 24 million people stacked on top of each other and they've had a total of seven Covid-related deaths.

But since we've been wearing masks, I've been amazed at the creativity of Americans. Americans have come up with some pretty funny masks.

We celebrated Easter in October last week as we read about the resurrection of Jesus. Mary Magdalene saw the Lord and He told her to go tell the disciples. We ended our message last week with her running to the disciples and shouting, "I have seen the Lord!" So how did the disciples react? Do think they were celebrating and shouting, "He is risen?" No, in fact Mark tells us how they reacted. Mark 16:10-11 says, "She (*Mary Magdalene*) went and reported to those who had been with him, as they were mourning and weeping. Yet, when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe it."

When you piece together all the Gospel accounts, we learn that in addition to Mary Magdalene, Jesus also appeared to some other women at the tomb. And on that afternoon, He walked on the Road to Emmaus with two disciples who didn't recognize Him.

As we read our scripture, it's now Easter Sunday night. Let's pick up the narrative.

John 20:19-23. When it was evening on that first day of the week, the disciples were gathered together with the doors locked because they feared the Jews. Jesus came, stood among them, and said to them, "Peace be with you." Having said this, he showed them his hands and his side. So the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I also send you." After saying this, he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. [*That's why I entitled this message BREATH OF HEAVEN*] If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Do you recognize the words "Breath of Heaven?" I borrowed the title of this message from a beautiful song Amy Grant wrote in 1992. It was from the perspective of Mary when the Angel Gabriel announced that she would become pregnant by the Holy Spirit. When she wrote the song, Amy Grant was very pregnant herself, and very afraid. The song was later featured in the movie *The Nativity Story*. Some of the lyrics relate to where all of us are today:

I am waiting in a silent prayer
I am frightened by the load I bear
In a world as cold as stone

Must I walk this path alone?
Be with me now
Be with me now

Breath of heaven...
Lighten my darkness
Pour over me your holiness
For you are holy
Breath of heaven.

From "Breath of Heaven" (Mary's Song), Amy Grant, 1992

That's my prayer for us today. That Jesus would come and pour over us His Holiness. The Holy Spirit is mentioned over 800 times in the Bible, but there is still a lot of ignorance among Christians concerning the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives. In the New Testament, we are commanded to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Let me share with you three things that happen in our lives when we are filled with the Holy Spirit.

1. THE HOLY SPIRIT GIVES US THE PEACE OF JESUS.

When the Bible says Jesus appeared to the disciples, we aren't just talking about the twelve apostles. There were actually only ten of original disciples there that night. Judas had committed suicide and Thomas wasn't there. And Luke tells us that the two disciples from Emmaus were there, probably some of the women including Mary Magdalene were there. But try to imagine the atmosphere that night. They were gathered in fear that they would be arrested. There was an air of fear and mystery because of the reports that the tomb was empty and Mary's claim that she saw the Lord. Then poof! Jesus appeared without using the door, and Luke tells us they were terrified that they were seeing a ghost. To put it in our language, they were freaked out.

And notice the first thing Jesus said: SHALOM. Peace be to you. Calm down. He said it twice. SHALOM. According to Luke, He invited them to touch His body. He asked, "Does a ghost have flesh and bones?" Then to demonstrate that He had a physical presence, He said, "Let me have some of that broiled fish to eat."

In a matter of minutes, their terror was turned to tranquility, their fright was changed to faith and their sorrow was turned to rejoicing. His Easter gift was the gift of personal peace.

Christmas is only 68 days from today, and it will probably look different than any Christmas we've had before. But one thing that I think we'll continue to do is give Christmas gifts. You don't have to wait for Christmas to get a gift, Jesus wants to give you the gift of personal peace today. Here's how Paul described God's gift of Peace found in Philippians 4:5-7: "Let your graciousness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And

the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

Paul didn't write those words when he was enjoying a meal in a palace, or lounging on the beaches of the Mediterranean. He was chained up inside a damp, dark dungeon. He was in prison. But because He had his eyes on Jesus, he could see the stars through prison bars. So how could he call on us to not worry and to accept peace? It's found in four powerful words in the middle of that passage. "The Lord is near." Paul was aware of the presence of Jesus with Him and in Him.

Over the past seven months, we have been dealing with a global pandemic. It's taken a physical and an emotional toll. The CDC reports that 40% of Americans say they have struggled mentally with the Covid crisis. There is an increase in anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and suicidal thoughts. In the midst of this pandemic, Jesus offers us the gift of peace. Peace is not the absence of problems and pain—peace is ability to quietly trust God in the midst of our problems and pain. Will you claim His peace today?

2. THE HOLY SPIRIT GIVES US THE PERSONALITY OF JESUS.

There are many personality tests you can take to see what kind of personality you have. I've met some mean people in my lifetime, and I've heard people comment about them, "They need a personality transplant." I agree. But, actually, that's true of all of us. We need the personality of Jesus transplanted in our lives. And there are two ways that God does that.

(1) The Holy Spirit resides IN us.

When you place your faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes to live in your spirit. He takes up residence in your life, just like a person moving into a new home or apartment. The Bible teaches that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.

In the Old Testament time, God directed the Israelites to build a tabernacle and later a temple. His shekinah glory dwelt in the Holy of Holies. But by the time Jesus came, although the temple still stood in Jerusalem, God's Spirit had moved out. In Matthew 23 Jesus said, "Your house is left unto you desolate." But God had a new temple: Jesus. The Bible says, "In Him, dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." And Jesus said, "If you destroy this temple, I will build it back in three days." He was talking about the temple of His body.

But after Jesus ascended to Heaven, God had a new plan. And that plan was called a mystery hidden from the ages. Do you like mysteries? I do. When I was a boy, I loved reading the Hardy Boys mystery novels. There were 58 different books and I probably read them all. The stories were about two brothers, Joe and Frank Hardy who, between attending classes and winning football games for Bayport High, always seemed to also have enough time to travel around the country and solve mysteries. The book titles usually had the word "secret" or "mystery" in the title, like *The Mystery of the Spiral Bridge*.

Did you know that Bible speaks of a huge mystery that was hidden for generations? But now it has been revealed. We read about it in Colossians 1:26-27. Paul wrote: "The mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints: God wanted to make known among the Gentiles the glorious wealth of this mystery, which is CHRIST IN YOU, the hope of glory." Those seven words are God's mystery: Christ in you, the Hope of Glory. It's good to talk about Jesus with us or Jesus for us. But it is life-changing to comprehend that Jesus is IN us!

(2) The Holy Spirit reveals Jesus THROUGH us.

Jesus promised that when the Spirit comes, He would not bear witness to Himself; instead He would testify of Jesus. The Holy Spirit is God. He is the third person of the Trinity but the Holy Spirit never wants to call attention to Himself; He always wants to promote Jesus in us.

Jesus said that you could know a person by their fruit. That is, by examining a person's actions and reactions, their personality. Fruit is the outward expression of the inner nature. When you see an apple hanging on a tree, you know that tree has the nature of an apple tree. When you see an orange on a tree, that tree has the inner nature of an orange. When you see spaghetti hanging on a tree—never mind. I know spaghetti doesn't grow on trees, I think it grows on bushes.

But you get the point. What is the fruit of the Christian life? You don't have to wonder, but these are specifically listed in Galatians 5:22. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."

Those nine character qualities describe the personality of Jesus. So when Jesus is living in us, that personality will be reside in us. For the first few years that I became a Christian, I thought it was my job to try to IMITATE those character qualities. But I was frustrated to discover that I couldn't be loving, joyful, and peaceful my own strength.

Over the past fifty years of preaching, let me share with you the two greatest secrets I have learned. First, I learned that salvation is by grace alone. There is absolutely nothing I can do to earn salvation. It is a grace gift we accept by faith. Second, I learned that God didn't expect me to live the Christian life. He only wants me to abide in Jesus and Jesus will live the Christian life in and through me.

When I was in college I read a book by Jack Taylor that changed my life. Jack was pastor of Castle Hills Baptist Church in San Antonio and real revival broke out in his congregation. He wrote a book entitled *The Key to Triumphant Living*. I checked on Amazon this week and it's still available.

He writes, "Being a Christian simply means that the Christ who came to dwell in us is going about acting like Himself in us. I may not understand it. I may not feel it all the time. But the blessed truth is that all the time, every night and day, at work and at play when I feel down and when I feel up JESUS CHRIST IS ALIVE IN ME. When I decided to trust Him as my Savior, He can to set up housekeeping in my life." (*The Key to Triumphant Living*, p. 38)

So the Holy Spirit gives us the peace and personality of Jesus. Finally,

3. THE HOLY SPIRIT GIVES US THE POWER OF JESUS.

Just before He ascended back to Heaven, Jesus said to the disciples, "You shall receive POWER after the Holy Spirit comes on you." The word power is the word *dunamis* from which we get our English words dynamite and dynamo.

So what about the timing? Did the disciples receive the Holy Spirit on this Easter evening, or at the Day of Pentecost? Jesus breathed over the disciples and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." The literal translation of that isn't "You are receiving the Holy Spirit." The verb is actually a command. A better translation is "I want you to receive the Holy Spirit."

Dr. Herbert J. Lockyer was a Scottish pastor and scholar who wrote dozens of books. He lived to be 98 years old. Here's what he wrote about this passage: "Did the disciples receive the Spirit at this time, or later on at Pentecost? It seems that this experience was prophetic—a foretaste of Pentecost. In breathing audibly, Christ created an atmosphere preparing them to receive the Spirit. Jesus is saying, 'Get ready to receive the Spirit.' His word was a command to the disciples."

Jesus spent an additional forty days with the disciples after the resurrection. Then He ascended back to Heaven. Ten days later, on the Day of Pentecost, 120 disciples were praying in the upper room and there was a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. What Jesus had commanded on Easter Evening, was being fulfilled on Pentecost. Those early disciples needed the power of the Holy Spirit for two reasons, and those are the same reasons we all need the power of the Holy Spirit.

(1) To take the message to the world.

Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me, so I'm sending you." That is John's version of the Great Commission. Jesus had a job for them to do—and He has the same job for us today. A lot of people talk about the filling of the Holy Spirit as if it some mystical, ecstatic experience. But God doesn't fill us for ENJOYMENT. He fills us for EMPLOYMENT. To share the good news with those who are lost. And Paul describes the Good News in one simple sentence. It's found in 1 Timothy 1:15: This saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"—and I am the worst of them.

People without Christ often say that we are "holier than thou." The reason say that is because some Christians act that way. But our attitude for evangelism ought to be one of humility—there but for the grace of God go I. Like Paul we should all claim to be the worst of sinners. The only difference is that we are sinners who have accepted God's forgiveness. But we can't share this message without the power of the Holy Spirit. And we need the power of the Holy Spirit:

(2) To announce forgiveness to the world.

Jesus said, "If you forgive the sins of others they will be forgiven." That has caused a lot of confusion in the Body of Christ. There are some professional Christians who believe God has bestowed upon them the power to forgive sins. But that's not what Jesus was saying here.

My friend and mentor Ray Stedman explains it this way: "Just as we must claim forgiveness, we can also offer it to people. That is why Jesus said, 'If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven, and if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.' This does not mean that we are given AUTHORITY to say to one, "You are forgiven," and to another. You are not." He was saying that we are empowered to DECLARE the forgiveness of sins when people believe in Jesus."

I can forgive someone if they sin against me—and I should forgive them. But if someone sins against God, I don't have the authority to forgive them.

In Mark 2 Jesus was teaching when four men dug a hole through the ceiling and lowered their paralyzed friend in front of Jesus. In Mark 2:5-7 we read: Jesus told the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." But some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts: "Why does he speak like this? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

The scribes were right. Only God can forgive sins. And Jesus is God, so He had the authority to forgive that man's sins. And today I can announce with the authority of Jesus Christ that if you place your faith in Jesus Christ and receive the free gift of eternal life, your sins are forgiven.

CONCLUSION

God wants you to be filled with the Spirit of Jesus every single day. When you are, you have the peace of Jesus, the personality of Jesus, and the power of Jesus.

Let me illustrate it this way. What if God came to me and said, "David, I will let you into Heaven on one condition: Here's a golf ball and a set of clubs. Go out to Willow Brook Country Club. If you shoot a round of golf at par or under par, I'll let you into Heaven."

Here's the problem, I've played many rounds of golf at Willow Brook over the past thirty years and I've only shot par or better maybe two or three times—and that was when I was much younger, and better. So, chances are I'm not going to make it to Heaven if I tried my very best.

But then God says, "To make it interesting, I will give you a choice. You can play the round yourself, or if you prefer, you can choose the skill of any PGA player to inhabit your body. Wow! That's totally different. I'm thinking Dustin Johnson? John Rahm? Justin Thomas, or Rory McElroy? Those are the top four golfers in the world. If one of them could drive the ball through me, hit wedges through me, and putt through me, wow! Any of those guys can drive every par four at Willow Brook. It's not a hard choice. I would choose to let their golf power inhabit my body.

God says, "Okay, you can try to live the Christian life in your own power. Or you can choose to allow my Son Jesus live the Christian life in you. He will love through you, have joy and peace through you." The golf scenario is pure imagination. But the spiritual scenario is real. That's why one of my life verses is Galatians 2:20. I claimed it this morning, and every morning. "For I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless, I live. But not I but Christ lives in me. And the life I live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me." Will you allow the Breath of Heaven to live in you?

Growing up I can remember singing a little chorus that said, "Breathe on me. Breathe on me. Holy Spirit, breathe on me. Take now my heart. Cleanse every part. Holy Spirit, breathe on me."

OUTLINE

1. THE HOLY SPIRIT GIVES US THE PEACE OF JESUS.

"Let your graciousness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." *Philippians 4:5-7 CSB*

2. THE HOLY SPIRIT GIVES US THE PERSONALITY OF JESUS.

(1) The Holy Spirit resides IN us.

The mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints: God wanted to make known among the Gentiles the glorious wealth of this mystery, which is CHRIST IN YOU, the hope of glory."
Colossians 1:26-27 CSB

(2) The Holy Spirit reveals Jesus THROUGH us.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." *Galatians 5:22-23 CSB*

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Jesus told the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." But some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts: "Why does he speak like this? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" *Mark 2:5-7 CSB*

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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