

"Full of the Spirit"

The text for this message is Ephesians 5:18: "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit." This verse contains 2 commands. The one says, "Don't get drunk on wine". The other says, "Be filled with the Spirit!" Don't be so filled with wine that you wind up drunk! That produces some bad results: debauchery, excessive indulgence in the wrong things. But if you're filled with *the Holy Spirit*, that produces something so much better!

On the day of Pentecost (one of the important Jewish religious festivals), God poured out His Spirit on the early followers of Jesus, and they got filled with the Holy Spirit. Up to then, the Spirit of God only came on a select few. But the prophet Joel announced that *in the last days* God would pour out His Spirit *on all flesh*. And that's exactly what happened on the day of Pentecost, as believers were together, waiting and praying for the Spirit to come, as Jesus had promised He would.

The account is found in Acts 2:1-4: "When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." Notice, it says, "All of them were *filled* with the Holy Spirit."

So, don't be filled with alcohol, which leads to *debauchery* (depravity); but be filled with the Spirit, which leads to *holiness and effective Christian living*. Imagine what would happen if $\frac{3}{4}$ of you came to church next Sunday drunk! Do you think it might make for an interesting morning if most of us came, disobeying the command not to be so filled with alcohol that we're drunk! Yet, $\frac{3}{4}$ of us might come to church *not filled with the Spirit*, and nobody is even aware of it! On the same note, if your preacher came to church drunk, that might present a bit of a problem. Yet a pastor can show up for worship, not filled with the Spirit, and nobody probably would ever know.

I think most of us are doing pretty well with the first command – at least not getting drunk and showing up for church! But the second part....well....how about if we work on that today! "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18).

Are you filled with the Holy Spirit? When we first put our faith in Christ, when we first get saved and become a Christian, we *receive* the Holy Spirit. This Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, comes and lives in us. Simon Peter preached a sermon on the day of Pentecost, right after the Spirit came in fullness. People were put under conviction of their sins, and wanted to be saved. In his message, Peter says, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

But the goal in relation to the Spirit is not just to *have* the Spirit in us, but for that Spirit to *fill us, to permeate us throughout, to control us*. E. Stanley Jones, the great missionary-evangelist of a previous generation once said, "In the new birth you have the Holy Spirit; in the fullness, the Holy Spirit has you!"

Let's look at this command to be filled with the Spirit, and ask three questions: Why is it so important to be filled with the Spirit? How can we know if we're filled with the Spirit or not? How can we become full of God's Spirit?

Why is it so important to be filled with the Spirit? The Holy Spirit is the one who empowers us for effective, triumphant living as a follower of Jesus. We see this early on in the difference the Spirit made once He filled the first followers of Jesus. *Before Pentecost*, the followers of Jesus were a tiny group of scared believers, sincere in their new commitment to the Risen Christ, but lacking power. *After the Spirit filled them at Pentecost*, a dramatic change took place. We see this in the Book of Acts in the New Testament. We don't want to look at them through rose-colored glasses. The first century Christians were still sinful. They had their problems and disagreements. But there was a new energy, a new boldness, and these timid followers began to fearlessly share the message of Jesus with their world, even when they faced opposition and persecution. They had a new holy power within them!

Haven't you ever wondered: Why is there so little joy and enthusiasm in my walk with Christ? Why am I so afraid to talk about Jesus and my faith with others? Why do I so often lack the power to turn from the things in my life I know are wrong? The answer is that we may be lacking the power of the Holy Spirit in our life. We may have *a little of Him*, but we're not *full of the Spirit*!

Why is it so important to be filled with the Spirit? Because the Holy Spirit is the source of *power* for Christian living! Before the Risen Christ left this earth and returned to heaven He said to His followers, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

He said that when we believe in Him, the Holy Spirit in us will be like "rivers of living water" flowing out of our heart – John 7:38. Would you describe your life in Christ as a gushing, flowing river, or an unsteady trickle or occasional drip!

When the Holy Spirit fills us, He also shapes us into being more like Christ! 2 Corinthians 3:18 says, "All of us who are Christians...reflect the glory of the Lord. We are transfigured in ever-increasing splendor into his own image, and the transformation comes from the Lord *who is the Spirit*."

So, why is it so important that we be filled with the Spirit? Because the Spirit spells the difference between just "being a Christian", to being a joyful, triumphant follower of Jesus who influences others for the Lord!

The second question is this: *How can I know whether or not I'm filled with the Spirit?* You get different answers, depending on whom you ask. Years ago when the charismatic movement was in full swing, people would say I know I'm filled with the Spirit because I had an experience where I got "baptized in the Spirit" and spoke in tongues. Others might say I had an experience

where the Spirit came in and I felt so warm and good inside. Others would say, "I don't believe you have to speak in tongues or have an emotional experience to be filled with the Spirit." Is there any way to measure the level of the Spirit's presence in my life – something more than just my subjective opinion? Yes there is. *It's the fruit test!*

Jesus once said we can tell a true prophet from a false prophet by the fruit they're producing – what their lives are producing. A good tree won't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree won't produce good fruit. The same test can be used to gauge how much of the Spirit is in us and controlling us. If I'm filled with the Spirit, then the *fruit of the Spirit* will be shown in the way I live.

The fruit of the Spirit is listed in Galatians 5:22-23: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." This is the measuring stick for seeing how full we are of the Spirit. How much I truly love others...do I know God's peace inside? How patient am I? How kind, and just "good"? Can others depend on me because I'm faithful and trustworthy? Is my life saturated with gentleness, a kind spirit? How much self-control do I have? So, the measuring stick for how much the Spirit fills my life is the 9 fruit of the Spirit.

Perhaps the most important question of the 3 we're looking at today is the third question: *How can I be filled with the Spirit?*

First of all, recognize that God wants to fill us with His Spirit! Jesus told us to *ask for His Spirit*. He *wants* to pour out His Spirit on us! He said, "If you sinful people 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" (Luke 11:13).

Being a believer, committing our lives to Him, or course is the first step. And when we are a believer Jesus wants us to have those life-giving "rivers of living water" flowing in us! There is a newer praise song called "Holy Spirit, Rain Down". God wants to rain on us, to send us the rain water of His Spirit and fill our lives.

Let me use a practical illustration, and analogy here. Let's suppose we want to fill a container with rain water. So, we place it outside our house. How can we cooperate to see that this container gets filled with the water God sends from the skies?

First of all, it has to be emptied. We don't want it filled with an old rag, or some other objects, so there's no room for the rain water. Our lives can be filled with stuff that allow no room for the Spirit to fill us: things like a negative attitude...an unforgiving spirit...self-centeredness...lust...dishonesty...bad habits and sins we know shouldn't be there. An important step in receiving the fullness of the Spirit is repentance, asking God to cleanse and empty us of the bad things so there's room for His Spirit. Remember, the Holy Spirit is the *holy* Spirit.

Secondly, if the dish is to be filled, it has to be faced with the open side upward. We have to have a real desire for the Spirit, a longing for more of Him! We can get so caught up with the material

things of life, so busy, so distracted, that we never get around to making the fullness of God's Spirit a priority for our life. A verse comes to my mind here. Jeremiah 29:13 says, "And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart."

Then, keep in mind that our being filled with the Spirit can take place gradually, or suddenly. Our dish can be filled with rain water suddenly from a drenching rain, or gradually, from lighter rains over the course of some days.

Most of the time we get filled with the Spirit gradually, over time, if we are growing in the Lord. But sometimes the filling comes suddenly, even dramatically. Some Christians have experienced what some call "the second blessing", where the Spirit comes upon a person, and changes them, and raises them to a higher plane of Christian living. John Wesley referred to this experience. I had an experience like this in my first or second year of college, and it helped keep me on course for my calling to pastoral ministry. The Spirit can come suddenly, or slowly, over time. And each is a valid way of receiving the Spirit's fullness!

Finally, staying filled with the Spirit happens through practicing spiritual disciplines. For our container to remain full, it requires regular replenishing of water. Sitting in the sun can dry it out. Or if our container has a slight crack in it, the water will leak out. In the physical realm, we may not get rain for a while, and our container will go dry. But God is always willing to pour the rain water of His Spirit to keep us filled, *if we will do our part.* Our part involves regular spiritual disciplines.

Sam Shoemaker was a wonderful Episcopalian priest who knew the fullness of the Spirit in his life. He wrote a book called *With the Holy Spirit and Fire*. In it he suggests some things a Christian can do to keep alive the fullness of the Spirit in us.

1. A commitment to Christ, made once and for all, but repeated each time I pray.
2. A definite time with God each day, if possible, at the start of the day, consisting of Bible study, prayer and meditation.
3. Weekly fellowship with other Christians, in the Church, and in a smaller group for mutual help.
4. A tithe gift (1/10th) of my income to God's work in the world.
5. An honest effort day by day to apply in my work and human relations Christian love, humility, truth and faith.
6. A real effort, by life and by witness, to win others to Christ, His way of life, and His kingdom.

These are the kinds of practices that will nurture the life of the Holy Spirit in us!

So....."Do not be drunk with wine....but be filled with the Spirit." Hopefully, we're doing pretty well on the drunk part! Now let's work diligently on seeking the fullness of God's Spirit permeating our lives!

