

That Was Filling

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Don't you love surprises? I'm not a big fan of being given a surprise party but I love surprise appearances by friends with a hot pizza. I remember when my son and his new wife came to visit and they drove up in this hot, orange, convertible mustang. It was great! They got announced and surprised me that they were pregnant and I'd be a grandfather. I said, "Cool. Now, about the car..."

It's nice just thinking about surprising things. It is surprisingly nice to see God alive and deciding to share the experience of life with another, a human, and then to watch with parent and creator-like delight that one enjoy life.

It was surprising and it is an amazingly nice thought to think of the infinite God, the eternal God, gathering all of himself up and crawling into a human body and time and space with us.

It was surprising that he would absolutely willingly die for us to set us free. It was surprising that he would do what no one had ever done and come back from the dead.

But then it was surprising that he would disseminate himself into whosoever wills. Not like a million little spores where everyone would have a tiny piece, but where everyone could have all of him in them. Ahh, that God himself would actually co-habit with your body, soul, and personality? Miracle. Miracle. Miracle.

Where are you with the miracles? Do you believe he came to earth? Do you believe he can live in your heart?

Listen to this – aren't we creatures that need to take things in to live? Air. Water. Food. Love. We took in God's breath to live *physically* (he breathed into the dust of the ground). Why wouldn't we take in God's spirit to live *eternally*? God made us to take in – even him.

I always like CS Lewis' point that it would be a strange world where people had stomachs, but there was no such thing as food. It'd be a strange creation where people had souls, but there was no God to work with there.

Last week we talked about being under the influence of God's Spirit and this is not incapacitating but helpful.

The life that takes in a chemical substance for help is hindered, hampered, and held back. The life that takes in God for life is helped, aided, and set free.

I could tell you ten ways at least how being under the influence of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit we are helped. We are helped by Him by being led into truth (he will teach you the truth), being made fruitful (the fruit of the Spirit is joy, peace, gentleness...), being made useful (each one receives a Spiritual gift, some to be pastors, some teachers...), helped in prayer (when we don't know how to pray the Spirit intercedes for us), helped to understand that we are sons and daughters of God (he has given us the Spirit of sonship by which we cry out, "Abba," father)....

But more than tell you how we are helped under the influence of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, I want us to know how we can come under the influence of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. I want us to tell us how we can have a personal Pentecost where the Holy Spirit comes down on to us and down into us. And there is a part of that over which we have no control and there is a part of that over which we have some control.

May I tell you about how I came to have a personal Pentecost? I was ten years old. I had moved with my family to San Diego. As part of our moving there a family invited us to church. We had gone to church because that's what American families do. But it was nothing more than a ritual that American families did. But at this church, even though I had gone to church many times before, for some reason this time there was something different. For some reason at this place and at this time I realized that what was being said in church was that Jesus Christ was the God of the universe in a human form and that he had died in my place for the sin of which I was a part.

It was like someone threw open the shade of a window and the message was written right there in front of me. A window of heaven and a burning thought over me, on me. And I thought (why think this now? How come to think this now? Holy Spirit), "One doesn't just go, 'Okay, he is the son of God who laid down his life for my sin,'" and then say, "May I have more potato salad please?" One has to decide the veracity of this. Is it true and if it is, we've got to do something with it. We've got to say, 'Thank you' or 'What do you want me to do?' or something!"

I said, “Jesus, I’d like to find out if you are real. I’m going to start by believing you are real, that you are God, and that you died for me, and that I can receive a new kind of life through you. Come into my life.” How did I make that moment happen? I didn’t. God did. But when it came, I said, “Yes.” You can look. You can study. You can ask. You can wait, as the disciples did in the upper room. And all these you can do and you should do, but, until in a very pressing and very personal way God’s voice comes to you saying, “I am here what will *you* do?” *you* cannot make yourself really come under the influence.

But when he does come to you, even slightly, when he does speak, even in a whisper, through a thought, through a remembrance of a Sunday School teacher, through a sermon, through a time of Bible study... you can say, “Yes, come in.” Did you know he says, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any one hears my voice, and opens the door, I will come into him or her.” He knocked on the door of that upper room and then came on them and into them.

You may say, “That’s not much of a personal Pentecost, Jeff. It is not like the big show we read about in Acts.” True. But it is still the moment when that basic miracle of Pentecost happened, God communicated with me (communication is what it is so about – they *heard* something like a mighty wind, there were *tongues* of fire, they *spoke*, Peter *preached*, many *heard*). God communicated with me and I said, “What must I do to be saved?” It is when I started to come under the influence.

I was thinking about this matter of how we can come under the influence of the Holy Spirit, how we can be filled, and what part *is* in our control and I

pictured filling. I pictured a container and water pouring down into its throat. I realized that if you were a container, you could have the lid on and all that flow would just splash off.

Remember that painting of Holmen Hunt from 1851 and Revelation 3:20, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice *and opens* the door, I will come in to him and dine with him and him with me”? We can talk to him through the door. We can slip notes to him under the door. We can look at him through the peep hole. We can even slip money to him through the key hole. But that is not opening the door to him. To be filled *we must open*.

Let’s say you open the lid but just a little. You could have a narrow opening or a wide opening. That would affect how easily and how much you could be filled, wouldn’t it? If there is no opening, there is no filling. But if the opening, if it is little, small, tight -- it is harder to fill. Many of us want just a little of God, not too much, that would be fanatical. So we have small openings. We would be neither hot nor cold, full or empty, just something inadequately in-between.

I realized that if you were a container you could have an impediment in the container’s throat. The stream is trying to go in but it is splashing out because there is something in the way. A bone or pebble. Some of us are holding on to something displeasing to God and it is making the filling very difficult.

I realized that if you were a container you could already be full of something else, jello or sand or something else, and the stream would just splash out. Some of us are filled with our own egos and agendas and rights and so, when God does speak to us, does knock on our door, does try to pour the Holy Spirit in,

there is no room. We can't hold on to our sin and our ego and our demands and our control and be filled with the Spirit.

As I close, here's what I want you to do. I want you to think about whether you want to be *under the influence*? On a scale of one to ten with one being "No" and ten being "Yes," do you want to be under the influence of Christ?

If you marked, "No," think about why. If you marked anything but ten, think about why? What is the thought that is making being overflowingly filled with the very spirit of Christ not something you want? Maybe you want to but there is something in the way or something else filling you, you sense that. If that is you, right now just take a moment to ask the Lord to speak to you about what that is.

*If you are one who **doesn't want the filling**,* could you pray this prayer? Let me say it and if you can, use it. "Lord, for some reason I either know or don't know, I don't want to be filled. Help me to understand why that is and what being under your influence might really mean for me."

*If you are one who **does want the filling**,* would you like to pray this prayer with me? "O God, bring it on! Bring on the Niagara of your presence into my life – bathe my heart, mind, soul, body, bathe my strength and my weakness, bathe me and fill me. O Christ, there is more than an invitation to have your Spirit come into mine, there is your command that I be continuously filled. I leak but I want to be filled this day and all days. Descend, descend, descend. Fill, fill, fill.

*If you are one who **feels impeded, more Holy Spirit around you than in you**,* try this prayer with me.

“O God, show me all that I want more than you. Show me how absolutely marvelous being wholly yours is. Make the idea of being neither hot nor cold, neither full or empty, a really distasteful idea to me. Dynamite out whatever the blockages are and fill me up.”

J.B. Phillips was to a generation several back. In the introduction to his translation he wrote these words:

The great difference between present-day Christianity and that of which we read in these letters (the NT epistles), is that to us, it is primarily a performance; to them it was a real experience. We are apt to reduce the Christian religion to a code or, at best, a rule of heart and life. To these men it is quite plainly the invasion of their lives by a new quality of life altogether. They do not hesitate to describe this as Christ living in them.

Friends, wouldn't it be great if someone in our generation would write of us, “To these people it was quite plainly the invasion of their lives by a new quality of life altogether. They did not hesitate to describe this as Christ living in them. They were full of the Holy Spirit.”

If you would like to talk with someone about this message or your spiritual life, or to have someone pray with you, the pastors and elders of the church would welcome your call.

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