

Holy Spirit, Church and Nations - Part 1

by T. Austin-Sparks

The Holy Spirit is essential for a full Christian life and the Church's effective witness in the world, and understanding the Holy Spirit as a person is crucial for a deep understanding of God's will.

Duration: 52:20

Scripture: Matthew 28:19-20, Mark 16:15, Acts 1:1-2, Acts 1:9-11, Acts 2:1-4, Acts 2:41, Romans 10:18

Topics: "Holy Spirit"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes that humanity is lost and astray when they fail to recognize their spiritual condition. The speaker highlights that the events and actions in the world have deep spiritual significance and carry profound truths. Despite the efforts of countless individuals and organizations to spread the gospel, only half of the world knows about God, and Christianity is losing its influence. The speaker draws a comparison to the early church, which initially had a powerful impact on the world but eventually experienced a decline in its testimony. The sermon concludes by mentioning the revival of the church's responsibility for mission work in the last hundred years.

Transcript

After that, he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit unto the Apostles whom he had chosen, and being assembled together with them, he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which said he, Ye have from me, for John indeed baptized with water, that ye shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit, not many days hence. I feel that the Lord is leading us at this time to a consideration of the Holy Spirit, the Church, and the nations. I trust that it can be assumed that we are all really concerned about two things.

There is, in the first place, a very real concern in our hearts for a Christian life in fullness, as full a Christian life as is possible. That is a necessary link between us and the Lord's will for us. For, as you notice, the Lord speaks about the Holy Spirit.

He uses that word filled. His thought is fullness. It is not just that we should receive the Spirit, but that we should be filled with the Spirit.

It is not just that we should be filled, but that we should be filled with the Spirit. Fullness is God's thought, and for us to come to God's thought, there really must, by necessity, be a deep concern and exercise about a full Christian life, a life of as great a fullness as the Lord intends it to be. And then, also, we have a

deep concern for an effective witness in the world by the Church as the Lord would have.

We really are concerned about this matter of as great as possible an effectiveness of the Church's testimony in the nations. Those two things are essential, not only to the realization of the Lord's thought, but they're essential to make profitable a time together like this. We are here in any other state of heart, then we shall find that we are not getting very far.

It is necessary, then, for every one of us here in this place to really be characterized by this two-fold concern for as full a Christian life as possible in the will of God, and for as an effective witness by the Church in the world as is possible. Now, in relation to those things, there are several governing considerations. Firstly, Christianity, the Christian life, and the Church owe their very existence to the advent of the Holy Spirit, to that day which is marked out in the history as being called the day of Pentecost.

There had been many days of Pentecost before that one. It was a regular season and feast in Israel. Through the centuries, the day of Pentecost had been observed regularly, every year.

But there never had been a day of Pentecost like this one, so much so that this is the only one that we ever think about when we use the word. We forget that it was a common word in Israel. It was in the common vocabulary and in the common course of Israelitish festivities.

It was what we might call almost a day-by-day ideal in Israel. And yet we forget all that. We forget the centuries.

We forget the scores of Pentecost when we use the very word itself, because we only think of that particular occasion. And rightly so. It swallowed up all the others.

It brought into full meaning all that the others had foreshadowed. It was the day of Pentecost, rightly called that in the Scripture. The day.

Christianity and the Church owe their existence to what happened on that day. That is, there is no Christianity, there is no Church recognized in the Word of God, in the Bible, or in heaven that is not the product of the Holy Spirit. There cannot be a Christian life without the Holy Spirit.

There cannot be a Church without the Holy Spirit. And of course, that leads to this, that Christianity and the Church can never fulfill their purpose or reach their divinely intended goal on any other ground than they started. That is, on the ground of the Holy Spirit.

There are no alternatives or substitutes for the Holy Spirit, for Christianity, or for the Church. If the Holy Spirit is not continuing with Christianity and with the Church, then Christianity and the Church lose the very meaning of their existence. But then there's further consideration.

The beginning of the Holy Spirit and his work was not just some unrelated set of acts. We have sometimes substituted for this artificial and unwarranted title in our Bible, the Acts of the Apostles, the other title, the Acts of the Holy Spirit. And we have resolved these things that are on record here into a set of acts, rightly attributing them to the Holy Spirit.

But they are so many quite wonderful acts, yet they were not just unrelated acts of the Holy Spirit, and certainly not of the Apostles. The falsehood of that title given to the book is seen in the fact that not a half

a dozen Apostles have any place in the book and in the Acts. While they are mentioned at the beginning, in toto, most of them disappear from the book after they are mentioned.

And the Apostles that are really in the Acts are very few. Paul and Peter and one or two others. This is not a record of the Acts of the Apostles.

It may be a record of the Acts of some Apostles. My point is that the Acts that are here are related to fundamental principles of the Holy Spirit. That is, they were the demonstration of certain spiritual realities which lay behind the Acts.

The Acts were not the sum total. We are all astray. We go completely astray when we fail to recognize that.

But what was happening was the demonstration of certain fundamental realities in the constitution of things. The demonstration of certain spiritual principles. They were not just happening.

Things that took place without any further meaning than themselves. They had a very deep meaning. They had a much greater significance than just the things that happened.

They carried with them deep spiritual truths. If you and I really are concerned about this matter of a full Christian life and of the Church's effective witness in the nation, we have got to get behind the Acts, to the meaning of the Acts, to the principles which the Acts demonstrate. For they were all very significant things, as I trust we shall see later.

We have there at that point to note, and it's so very obvious, what a sad contrast there is between the first 30 years of Christianity and of the Church and of all the centuries since. There really has been nothing in all these centuries comparable to those first 30 years. The world certainly was a very much smaller place in a sense then than it is now.

Not of course in actual mileage, but as a world. But even so, it is not just measurement of numbers, range of nations that governs this. It's the comparative factor.

But then, in that world, that whole world of nations and peoples, an impact was registered which has no comparison at any time since. And it is doubtful whether all the ages put together could represent the spiritual force that was there in those first years. There they were.

The witness in the nations was a tremendously effective thing. We do not stay to remind you of what happened, what was found at the end of the life of the Apostle Paul alone. That is, in the course of one Apostle's lifetime, how things were when Paul was converted.

Small and struggling, limited in range and in effect. And how things were when Paul went to the Lord. The churches in practically every nation and many of them far, far beyond all national locations.

Their sound went into all the earth and their word unto the end of the world. That is the thing. Members record in one not very long lifetime of Christian service on the part mainly of one man.

I say there's nothing to compare with it. Then there set in something at that point which arrested it almost entirely. At any rate, started a downgrade movement so that about four little lamps of testimony here and there from time to time in remote places.

The whole church, the church as a whole lost its sense of responsibility for the world and its testimony in the world. So deeply and terribly was that true when we arrive at so late a time as the life of William Carey. Who way there in a country church spoke about the obligation that rests upon the church of God for taking the gospel of Christ to the heathen.

Was immediately pounced upon by a member of the gathers company and rebuked with young man if God ever wants to evangelize the heathen. He'll do it better material than you. He'll do it without our help.

Such an utter loss. A sense of responsibility. But then we come to what we may call the renaissance.

The revival of that responsibility and the last hundred years and I'm not going to give you a history of missions. That's not the point. You see what I'm coming to soon.

But all that has been poured into this matter say in a hundred years. You think of all the lives that have gone out with this inspiration to evangelize. A great and mighty army of men and women have gone into the mission.

You think of all the many millions of pounds put into this. It would be a tremendously impressive thing dear friends if I could bring to you this afternoon a statement as to how many societies there are engaged in this work and how many representatives they have and how many they have had since they were founded and how much money had been poured into this. How much labor and organization and what not.

It would be a startling and amazing story. All the country that have given of their resources in persons and means and energy. Today not half the world knows anything about the gospel with it all.

Not half the world. And what is more Christianity is losing its influence in this world. Only to look at our own country.

See the loss of the influence of Christianity in this country. How tragic it is. We are noting it now.

Loss of testimony in high places. Loss of the place of God amongst authorities and rulers. And the terrible, terrible growth of godlessness.

Of God forgetfulness and God ignoring in the western world. What's the matter? I say all this by way of drawing the comparison. At the beginning the church had a registration upon this earth which provoked the world to say the men that have turned the world upside down have come hither.

Stirred rulers and nations and hell provoked with fear for this thing. The presence of this thing. It is not like that.

I don't dwell too much upon the story and it's a terrible story. Spiritual ineffectiveness today and the kind of Christianity that is very general. With all honor and respect for the devoted and the true and the sacrificing.

I'm speaking quite generally. Why? What's the matter? I am certain dear friends that it brings us back to this whole question of the Holy Spirit and it challenges us and it provokes in us surely some questions. Questions that immediately arises in our hearts if it is an allowable, a permissible question is have we any ground for believing that the Holy Spirit would continue or repeat the work of those first 30 years? Was it just something for a time? Did God just then in this massive way demonstrate something? Did not intend it to be perpetuated? It was for a time and something to be looked back upon.

We cannot accept that. Have we ground? Have we ground for really believing that God would have continued to do that like that and that God would repeat that again? Well I think the answer lies in two directions. First of all surely it is at least implied.

I think it is implicit in these words of Luke at the beginning of this second treatise of his. The former treatise I made of all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day in which he was received. Implicit in that statement is not only that now Luke is saying I'm going to tell you what he continues to do after he's received us but surely that his receiving up and the continuation of his work from his heavenly position is not something related to time and a short time at that.

A few years of one man's life. We cannot accept that. Surely we would believe we have ground for believing that from his heavenly position he would go on and in a reality he is going on with his work because it is a work for a whole dispensation.

Whole of the word I think bears that out. He says unto the end of the age. He said it himself.

I am with you all the days even unto the end of the age. The end of the age did not come when the apostle Paul was executed and went to the north. But we have other evidence that answers our question.

That through these ages and even in our own day where the Lord has his required condition he does this very thing. He does it. The thing happens.

It may not be worldwide but there it is here and there from time to time the Lord has done something comparable in its range to what happened at the beginning. He's just done it and in some parts of the world he is doing it now. It is there and it can be seen.

The Lord is doing something quite wonderful and when you see it and know it you have to say this this is just what you have in the book of Acts. There it is. Yes there are instances through history that prove it that if the Lord had his required condition he would go on with the same kind of work as he did at the beginning.

That leads of course to two lines of inquiry. Firstly why was the work arrested? Why did that stop or begin to fade out at a certain clearly defined point in the history of Christianity? You can see when it began to happen. And if you look into it you can see why it began.

That only leads us to put the matter in another form. The question in another form. What are the grounds of the Holy Spirit's work? We can answer the second.

We've answered the first. Why it was arrested? The answer is found in discovering the ground on which the Holy Spirit works and goes on with his work. Well that brings us right immediately to this matter of the Holy Spirit.

And in the first place it is a matter of the Holy Spirit himself. Who is the Holy Spirit? What is the Holy Spirit? The second question that will arise will be what instrument will the Holy Spirit use? What kind of an instrument did he use? Therefore what instrument will he use? For the Holy Spirit is particular. He is particular as to his vessel.

Who and what is the Holy Spirit? Well first of all what the Holy Spirit is not. And what the Holy Spirit did not come to do. You know.

A very serious error is to be avoided. That error of making the Holy Spirit impersonal and making the effects of the Holy Spirit be everything. If you understand what I mean.

The Holy Spirit is not in the first place an influence. He may exercise an influence but in the first place he is not an influence. He is not in the first place a sense.

You may sense him but he is not just a sense. The Holy Spirit is not in the first place a principle. He may work by principles.

The Holy Spirit is not in the first place a power. We make the effects of the Holy Spirit everything or are in danger of doing that. These things are just characteristics of the Holy Spirit.

But the Holy Spirit himself is a person. Just as truly a person as the Father and the Son. Word of God does not refer to the Holy Spirit as an it.

Jesus always spoke of the Holy Spirit as he. As he when he is come. Now you may think that this doesn't require such emphasis that's accepted and recognized by most evangelical Christians.

But I say we can get into difficulty if we're not careful about this matter. We put more upon the characteristics than upon the person himself. We are reckoning with God Almighty in the person of the Holy Spirit.

We may ask to seek for power and for wisdom and for life and for influence and for strength and consciousness. What we really must always keep in mind is we may ask to seek for power and for wisdom and for life and for influence and for strength and consciousness. What we really must always keep in mind is that it is this divine person himself who with him is the Father and the Son one God.

It is God's presence. Truly God present himself in person as ever Jesus himself was God present in person. You go through this book called The Acts.

You will see that neither in the church nor outside of the church were people having to do with some abstract thing. They were having to do with a living person present. When Ananias and Sapphira Peter said, Why has Satan filled thy heart to lie to the Holy Spirit? You don't lie to an abstraction.

To lie to the Holy Spirit. Like that in every connection. Dealing with a living present person.

God himself. When the apostle spoke about strangers coming in to the assembly and registering, he did not say they will say there's some powerful influence present here. There's, I'm conscious of some strange atmosphere here.

He said they will fall down and say God is in the midst of you. They'll relate everything to God and say this is God that you meet here. Dear friends, whether you see the importance of this or not, it is a very important thing that the registration should be the registration of none other than God himself.

If that is true, tremendous implications there are. He is not an it. He is a person.

What did the Holy Spirit not come to do? Well, he did not come to start a new religion. Let it be very carefully noted. Christianity was not a new religion set up and over against or alongside of other religions and made one of the comparative religions.

It was quite a long time before some of the leading apostles themselves realized the implication of their new position. They did not at once come to the conclusion that their Jewish religion as such was finished and now they were in the Christian religion. There was no such dividing in their consciousness or realization.

I say it was some time before they realized the implication of their new position. It was not clear cut in a moment. They grew into it.

They found themselves moving in a certain direction, in spirit, gradually moving away from something, feeling themselves out, more and more out of something that they had been in, and more and more involved in something. But what this something was, was not clear to them. Think of Peter and the House of Cornelius.

Peter was not at all clear as to the implications of this strange departure, this innovation of God. Peter had the idea or the belief that Judaism is wound up and finished and Christianity now comes in to take its place as a religion. There would have been none of that battle at all over the Gentiles in the life and heart of Peter.

Others there in Jerusalem, leading apostles and elders, who took a very long time, even if they ever did get quite clear on this matter. All the evidence is that the Holy Spirit did not come to set up a new religion called the Christian religion. It's very important for you and for us all to recognize that, dear friends.

That's the negative way of putting it. Positive way is we really have got to know what Christianity is, what it really is. It is not a new religion.

The Holy Spirit did not come to launch a new movement in this world. No, not a new movement. If he had done that, if that had been his object, then we should have had in this book some committees being set up, consultative and executive, and plans being laid and made for the evangelization of the world.

Tremendous amounts of machinery and organization. The impressive thing about this whole book is anything like that as the basis upon which the work was initiated. No, it was not a new movement that the Holy Spirit came to launch.

No thought out campaigns existed. They were so often taken by surprise. They were compelled to do things that they never thought of doing or intended to do.

They were launched altogether beyond their depth. Many things that they had planned never took place or were satisfied. No.

Let us be very careful about this. It's not a new movement. Not a movement at all that was felt with a capital M, but the Holy Spirit had come to inaugurate.

Further, the Holy Spirit did not come to inculcate a new teaching. We need to be well informed and instructed on this matter. There is no ground whatever.

There is nothing in the whole story to rest an argument upon or an affirmation that the apostles went out into the world with the teaching of Jesus. It may surprise you, startle you to hear that said, but there is absolutely nothing to warrant any such idea that these apostles went out into the world with the teaching of Jesus. Whatever Confucius may teach, whatever Buddha may teach, whatever the other great religious

teachers or leaders or founders may teach, this is the teaching of Jesus.

That was not their idea at all. That was not the Holy Spirit's idea. They were not propagating a system of doctrine.

All the things happened before the explanation of them was given. The teaching came after the event. Things happened and then explanations were given.

Our New Testament teaching was made necessary by what was happening. It was not, now this is the teaching, go and put it into practice and constitute everything according to it. That's a long way around.

Don't get a New Testament church like that. You don't get a Holy Spirit movement like that. This is the teaching.

Therefore, had everything conformed to it, Holy Spirit took things into his own hands and launched and landed the church right out beyond its own understanding and comprehension. Then afterwards, anointed or endowed men to teach them the meaning of their experience of what had happened to them. See, we've got to get things around the right way.

Oh, that we could get back there where the Holy Spirit does it and we don't understand what he means, what he's doing, and then we go to the Word of God and find, oh, this is that. This is that. This is the explanation.

It's here in the Word of God. No, not a new teaching. And the Holy Spirit never came to make something, something that is called the church.

It is true that the church was born on the day of Pentecost. Here we've got to get a little clearer and a little straightened out. Not something called the church.

See, our mentality in relation to that word church may be a bit confused. We have got an object in our mind, in our view. We have got a thing called the church.

Oh, it goes by that name. It's only one of many names. The Holy Spirit did not come to make a new thing by the name of the church.

What did he come for? If he did not come for any of these things, what did he come for? The Holy Spirit came to reproduce Jesus Christ in the lives of men and women. The church is that, or it is nothing. The teaching relates to that, or it has no meaning.

Any movement of the Spirit is in that direction, or we have entirely misunderstood. He came to reproduce the Lord Jesus in the lives of men and women. Everything has got to be tested by that.

All our activities and energies and expenditure and sacrifice and machinery and everything else, all our efforts and our movement and all our teachings, everything that has become a part of Christianity has got to be tested by one rule. Is it resulting in the reproduction of Jesus Christ in the lives of men and women so that it is demonstrated from heaven that Jesus is as truly here in this world now as ever he was in history? Yes, not only as powerfully but more so because he spoke of his being limited until the Spirit came. Present not only in the works that he did but according to his own words, in greater works than these shall he do because I go to him.

That's how it was in those first 30 years. And the presence of Christ was the great, the great interest. That was the thing that men everywhere realized that is why the believers were called Christians, Christ ones, Christ ones.

The only way of explaining it. The Holy Spirit came for that and if there's going to be any continuation or any repetition of things then it will only be, it will only be as we come right back to this. Not only belief in Jesus Christ, his deity, his sinlessness, his atonement as doctrines but as by the Holy Spirit he is livingly present in us.

When it's like, you see, the thing was just that by the Holy Spirit Christ was present in these believers in a mighty way. When you think and speak of being filled with the Spirit what do you mean? What do we mean? What the New Testament means by being filled with the Spirit is being filled with the Lord Jesus. I've got to stop there for this afternoon but that is just the point where we move on and over into the real significance of Pentecost.

It is, so to speak, the bringing of Christ back again in a new mighty advent, this time not externally but inwardly. Inwardly. Let us leave it there unfortunately for the moment but we are now getting near to the meaning of the Holy Spirit.

It is just that and I repeat everything has got to be judged according to that. Oh yes, when he, when he has his place, the place that he ought to have and the measure that he ought to have, things will happen. They will happen spontaneously and mightily as they did then.

It is all resolved into this matter of Jesus glorified.

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