

(The Full Gospel) 1. the Full Gospel

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen's sermon emphasizes the importance of embracing the Full Gospel for spiritual maturity and living in God's presence.

Scripture: Acts 20:21-31, Romans 8:3, 1 Corinthians 2:2, Ephesians 5:31, Hebrews 5:13, Hebrews 6:1, 1 John 4:16

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Sanctification"

Description

Zac Poonen preaches on the importance of not just preaching 'faith' but the full gospel, which includes repentance, faith, and the grace of God. He emphasizes the need for believers to progress beyond the basics of salvation and baptism to experience the baptism in the Holy Spirit and to enter into the Most Holy Place, symbolizing dwelling in God's presence and partaking of His nature of love. Poonen highlights the journey from the outer court (salvation) to the holy place (baptism in the Holy Spirit) and finally to the most holy place (divine nature), urging believers to crucify their self-will daily and walk in obedience like Jesus did.

Transcript

"I did not shrink back from declaring to you the whole purpose of God" (Acts 20:27).

The apostle Paul spent three years in Ephesus, preaching night and day (Acts 20:31). What did he preach?

To the unconverted heathen, he preached repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21). But to those who had become believers he preached "the whole purpose of God" (Acts 20:27).

Today, most preachers preach only "faith" - and that too a counterfeit one - which has resulted in many spiritual "miscarriages" in evangelistic meetings, producing a great multitude of half-converted "believers", who have never turned from their sins, but who want to come to Jesus only in order to be "blessed".

Some preachers however are more Scriptural, and preach that repentance must precede faith - as Paul did.

But Paul did not stop even there. He went on to preach the full gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24).

Many think that they have experienced the 'full gospel' when they have known Jesus as Saviour AND Baptizer in the Holy Spirit.

But Hebrews 6:1, 2 tells us this is only the beginning of the Christian life: "The elementary teachings concerning the Christ - the foundation of repentance and faith (that is, forgiveness of sins - knowing Jesus as Saviour), baptisms and laying on of hands (that is baptism in water and baptism in the Holy Spirit - knowing Jesus as the Baptizer in the Holy Spirit who gives us spiritual gifts), and resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment (at the second coming of Christ)".

This is the milk that newborn babes in Christ need to drink first (Hebrews 5:13). But because most believers remain babes all their lives, they never go on to experience the solid food of the full gospel.

Such were the Hebrew Christians, and the Corinthian Christians.

Paul writing to the Christians at Corinth said, "I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2).

Why couldn't he tell them anything beyond the fact that Christ had died for their sins and been raised from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:1-4)?

He explains the reason in 1 Corinthians 3:2: Because they were babes, unable to digest solid food. They had not responded sufficiently even to the foundational truth that they had been taught. So Paul could not lead them further. And so they remained carnal, defeated by strife and jealousy, and party spirit, etc.

When people are babes, we cannot teach them anything beyond 'Jesus Christ and Him crucified'. Thus, such believers remain carnal.

"But," says Paul to the Corinthian 'babes', "we do speak God's wisdom among those who are mature (that is, among those in other churches, who could eat solid food)the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory" (1 Corinthians 2:6, 7).

The church in Ephesus was one such church where Paul could preach the full gospel.

What is the full gospel?

We can look at the Old Testament tabernacle and learn some lessons concerning it from there.

The tabernacle was a God-given symbol of His dwelling place. In its symbolism, we can see what the full gospel is and how we can enter into the enjoyment of God's presence and His full purpose for our lives.

The tabernacle had three parts to it - the outer court, the holy place and the most holy place - representing three parts of the full gospel.

The First Part of the Gospel - Jesus Our Saviour

In the outer court, there were the altar of sacrifice and the laver of water (for washing). The altar represents the message of 'Christ crucified for our sins'. The laver represents the external cleansing of our lives (Hebrews 10:22), and the washing of regeneration (Titus 3:5) that we testify to in the baptism in water (Acts 22:16).

This is the first stage of the Christian life, where a person repents and trusts in Jesus as his Saviour - who bore the penalty for his sins - and is then baptized in water.

The Second Part of the Gospel - Jesus Our Baptizer

Whereas the outer court was open to all the Israelites (but not to the heathen), the Holy Place was open only to the priests - to those who were engaged in the service of the Lord.

In the Old Testament, the most important requirement to serve the Lord - whether as a prophet, priest or king - was the 'anointing of the Holy Spirit'. No human qualification could be a substitute for this anointing. Even Jesus did not step out into His public ministry without first being anointed with the Holy Spirit. The Lord desires to lead His children from 'the outer court' into this realm - to the anointing of the Spirit and the exercise of spiritual gifts for His service.

The Holy Place had three items of furniture in it:

The lampstand - which symbolised the anointing giving us power to be witnesses for Christ (Acts 1:8).

The table of showbread - which symbolised the anointing giving us revelation on the Word (2 Corinthians 3:18).

The altar of incense - which symbolised the anointing giving us power in prayer (Romans 8:26, 27).

To reach thus far is to reach the second stage of Christian life - receiving not only the forgiveness of sins and water-baptism, but the baptism in the Holy Spirit as well.

The Third Part of the Gospel - Jesus Our Forerunner

The Most High Place, was where the glory of God dwelt in the tabernacle. Like the New Jerusalem (which symbolises the church), this too was an exact cube: "Its length, width and height are equal" (Revelation 21:16).

No person - not even a priest - was permitted to go into the Most Holy Place. Even the High Priest could go in only once a year to atone for the sins of the people. This highlighted the fact that the way into the immediate presence of God was still not open for any man (Hebrews 9:8).

We learn thereby that even the finest of Old Testament saints could go only as far as the Holy Place, in terms of their spiritual experience.

John the Baptist was the greatest person born of women up until the birth of Jesus. He was greater even than Mary, as Jesus said in Matthew 11:11. Yet Jesus went on to say that the least one who entered the kingdom of God would be greater than even John the Baptist. Why?

Old Testament saints could receive a number of blessings from God. They could receive forgiveness of sins (as David received - Psalm 103:3) and be justified by faith (as Abraham was - Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:2, 3). They could also come to an external righteousness of life (as Zacharias and Elisabeth came to - Luke 1:6) and be anointed for service (as Gideon and Elisha were - Judges 6:34; 2 Kings 2:9-15).

In other words, they could come into the Outer Court and even into the Holy Place. But when they came to the veil curtaining-off the Most Holy Place, they could not proceed any further. They could not partake of

God's nature.

Under the New Covenant however, the way has been opened for us to enter right through the veil into the Most Holy Place. We are told in Hebrews 10:19, 20 that we now have "confidence to enter the (most) holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh".

The temple in Jerusalem (built according to the pattern of the tabernacle) also had a veil between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. This was torn from top to bottom, when Jesus died on Calvary (Matthew 27:50, 51). This signified a finished work that Jesus had done in His flesh.

The secret of living a godly life (we are told in 1 Timothy 3:16) lies in knowing that Christ came in the flesh and kept His spirit pure and undefiled. It is thus that the way into the Most Holy Place has been opened for us to enter in.

Man's self-will is the thick "veil" that blocks off the presence of God from him. Jesus denied His own will at all times during His earthly life. It was thus that He kept His spirit pure. We too can walk the same way, if we "crucify the flesh (self-will) with its passions and desires" (Galatians 5:24). We can then dwell in the Most Holy Place always as Jesus did.

When the apostle writes to the Hebrews, contrasting milk with solid food (Hebrews 5:13), he tells them that the truth ('solid food') was "difficult to explain" (verse 11). That truth (as the context clearly shows in Hebrews 5:7-10) referred to Christ in the days of His flesh, praying with loud crying and tears, suffering, obeying and being made complete.

Just as it was difficult for many believers to receive this truth in the first century, it is difficult for most believers to receive it today also. And the reason is the same - because they are "dull of hearing" (Hebrews 5:11). And they are dull of hearing because they are content with their sub-standard defeated state.

But God gives revelation to those who are hungering and thirsting for a godly life. The secret of the Lord is whispered in the ears of those who fear Him (Psalm 25:14). Thus they find the secret of perfection.

In the Most Holy Place we can have the righteous requirement of God's Law fulfilled within us (Romans 8:3, 4). We can partake of the Divine nature. God is Love and the righteous requirement of the law can be summed up in one word: LOVE - that is, loving the Lord with all our hearts and loving our neighbours as ourselves.

"Godliness" or partaking of the Divine Nature of LOVE, was impossible for people under the Old Covenant, because the Holy Spirit could not dwell in people's hearts then. But that is now possible. This is the pearl of great value, to possess which, we must give up all other pearls.

God is Love and "the one who abides in love abides in God" (1 John 4:16). One who does not live in love cannot live in God's presence. The Bible says that "love is as strong as death" (Song of Solomon 8:6). That means that just as death spares no one but comes upon all human beings, even so God's love also comes upon all human beings. In the New Covenant, where death has been conquered by Jesus, we could say that "Divine love is stronger than death". The love of God manifested by Jesus could not be overcome by all the hatred and venom and bitterness (spiritual death) that was hurled at Jesus during His earthly life. The light of God's love shone in the darkness and the darkness could not overcome it.

It is only when our self-will is crucified through the power of the Holy Spirit that we can live in the Most Holy Place and love everyone with divine love.

With most believers (even with many who preach holiness) their love is restricted to those within their own group. They may never speak evil of anyone in their own group, but they feel quite free to speak and hear evil about other believers. Examine yourself, dear reader, and see if that is not true of your own life. Such 'love' is human love, not divine. When believers are satisfied with such an exclusive 'ghetto-mentality', they never rise any further.

Jesus came to make us both good and loving like the Father, who makes His sun to rise on all people - irrespective of their attitude towards Him.

Jesus was tempted in every point as we are (Hebrews 4:15). In other words, He was tempted to do His own will and please Himself in numerous ways. God took His Son, during the 33½ years that He was on earth, through the entire range of temptations possible to man. And Jesus came through triumphant in every one of them. He never once yielded to His self-will. Thus He never sinned even once, in thought, word, deed, attitude or motive. Self-will becomes sin only when it is yielded to.

This was the "education" the Jesus went through during His earthly life: He learned obedience, when obedience meant suffering (Hebrews 5:8). And the suffering referred to here is suffering that comes through denying one's own will.

The opposite of suffering is enjoyment. There are two options that we all have whenever we are tempted - either to enjoy the pleasure of doing what pleases us or to suffer by putting our self-will to death. Jesus chose to suffer consistently. "He never pleased Himself" (Romans 15:3).

By the time Jesus died on the cross, He had gone through the entire range of temptations possible for man and come out triumphant in every one of them. On the eve of His crucifixion, He could say, "Father, I have finished the work You gave Me to do" (John 17:4). And with the completion of His offering Himself on the cross, the veil was rent. The way into the Most Holy Place was open at last.

2 Corinthians 4:10 says that "we always carry about in the body the dying of Jesus so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body." What does the "dying of Jesus" mean here? We can have no part in the death that Jesus died on Calvary's cross, where He died for the sins of the world. There He died alone. There He rent the veil and opened the new and living way for us. We don't have to rend the veil a second time now, for it has already been rent. The way into God's presence is permanently open. But we have to walk the way of the rent veil - the way of the cross. We are to share in His perpetual "dying" - the dying to our self-will.

Jesus is our Forerunner who walked this way of self-denial before us. Through this new and living way that He inaugurated for us, we can dwell in the Most Holy Place all the days of our life. This is not a once-for-all experience like entering through a door. It is a way that we must walk on, day by day - taking up our cross daily.

You can live in the Most Holy Place one day and be back in the Holy Place or the Outer Court the next day, if you are not careful. You can even end up outside God's tabernacle, if you live according to the flesh (See Romans 8:13). It takes only 24 hours for a person to backslide and for his heart to be hardened. It takes only 24 hours to become bitter towards someone whom we had once forgiven. That is why we are

told to exhort one another DAILY (within every 24-hour period), to avoid backsliding. If we don't have a brother or sister to exhort us daily, we must allow God's word and the Holy Spirit to exhort us DAILY (Hebrews 3:13).

The full gospel then is that "what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did" (Romans 8:3, 4). In other words, what was not possible under the old covenant - namely, having victory over sin in our inner life, and partaking of God's nature - is now possible. God has made a way for us to partake of His own nature of LOVE.

When a person enters into the Most Holy Place, he enters the third stage of the Christian life - the highest stage.

In the Most Holy Place, only God dwells. Those who dwell here dwell with God and have been freed from people - freed from seeking the honour of men and even of Christian leaders. They have also been freed from being offended, from complaining and grumbling, and from bitterness and envy. They are now free to love others even as Jesus loved them, irrespective of whether they are loved in return or not.

They now seek the honour of God alone, in all that they do - being more conscious of God than of people, when they pray and speak in the meetings for example. They fear God and therefore their inner (hidden) life is as pure as their external life.

Those who dwell here have seen that all that is big and great in the eyes of men is an abomination in God's sight. They now consider everything as rubbish compared to the possibility of partaking of the nature of God in Christ.

Having entered into a life of victory over sin, they are kept from falling by the power of God and partake of the glory of God, more and more. They always give thanks for everything and they live before the face of God in all that they do.

Those who dwell in the Most Holy Place receive increasing discernment, in God's light, on what is only soulish (human) and what is really spiritual (divine).

There is a lot of difference between imitating Jesus and partaking of His nature. When we imitate Him, life is a constant struggle. But when we partake of His nature, we come to rest.

We all know how easy it was for us as children of Adam, to hate, tell lies, get angry, lust after women, seek man's honour, love money, and be selfish and proud - because that was our nature. When we partake of the divine nature, it can become just as easy for us to love, speak the truth, be patient, pure, generous, unselfish and humble and seek the glory of God.

It is easy for a cat to lick its body and keep itself clean at all times. That is not a strain for a cat, for that is its nature. But for a pig to do that - imitating the cat - would be a constant strain. That illustrates the difference between partaking of a nature and trying to imitate it.

God gives us His own life - "the life of Jesus" (2 Corinthians 4:10). Thus we can partake of God's goodness, which is His glory. Then it won't be a strain for us to be good to those who are evil to us, or to forgive those who sin against us. We can continue in this Divine goodness until the end of our lives, just like a cat continues to lick itself clean until the end of its life.

It is in the Most Holy Place also that people are formed together into a functioning Body (as opposed to a mere congregation). There is no individualism in the Most Holy Place. No one here lives unto himself. Everyone who lives here is a perpetual sacrifice and therefore God is able to make all such brothers and sisters into the functioning Body of Christ with spiritual authority in a locality. It is about those who live here that Jesus spoke as 'agreeing' and having authority to receiving anything they ask for from the Father, and who can bind Satan's power at will (Matthew 18:18-20).

In every assembly of Christians, the vast majority dwell in the Outer Court - having responded to one-third of the gospel message. Some progress into the Holy Place - being anointed by the Holy Spirit. These have responded to two-thirds of the gospel message. But the spiritual authority and effectiveness of that assembly (as far as God is concerned), is measured in terms of the number who have entered into the Most Holy Place(those who have responded to the full gospel).

Satan fears only those who have gone through the veil into the Most Holy Place. This is why he has blinded believers to the full gospel.

It is only when there is a central core in an assembly of those who dwell permanently in the Most Holy Place, that the assembly can be kept pure from the forces of spiritual death and preserved in the way of life.

The Bride of Christ becomes one flesh with her Bridegroom.

"The two shall become one flesh - this is a great mystery, but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:31, 32).

Don't be satisfied then with anything less than God's highest for your life. Do violence to all sin that would stand in your way and also to all the traditions and opinions of man that would hinder you from pressing on into the place that Jesus has inaugurated and opened for you.

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