

Who is the Spirit?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 16 January 2025

Preacher: Luke R

[0 : 0 0] This is a sermon from King's Church West the Holy Spirit is God. The Holy Spirit is God. I don't know if you know this old hymn. It says Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, early in the morning our song shall rise to thee.

Holy, Holy, Holy, merciful and mighty, God in three persons, blessed Trinity. We see in the Bible that the one true God is seen to exist eternally in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit has all of the divine attributes of God, being eternal, being omnipresent. I was just reading in the Psalms, it says, where can I go from your spirit? The answer's nowhere. You can't go anywhere away from God's spirit. He is everywhere.

He is all-knowing. He is all-powerful and he is holy, the Holy Spirit. But wonderfully, the Holy Spirit is not just a force, not just something that's impersonal, but he is a person of God, one of the three persons of God. And he acts personally in our lives. He comforts us. He teaches us. He speaks to us. He guides us and so on. These are some of the things we've been talking about over the last few weeks. But today we're going to be exploring how can we know the Holy Spirit for the very first time? How can we know the Spirit for the very first time? For some of us, I'm looking around the room, if you've been a Christian for a while, it might be today you're remembering that first moment. You put your trust in God, put your faith in God, and you experience the Holy Spirit beginning to work in your life. It might be for some of us that you're on a bit of a journey starting to learn about, well, who is God? You know, how do I fit into this? Or maybe you've just come and you've got no idea where you are today and hopefully this will be helpful for you too. But it might be as you listen that hopefully for each of us we'll experience the Holy Spirit at work in us. So I wonder if you could just join me. Let's pray together and let's expect and have hopeful hearts that the Spirit would speak to us today. Oh Lord, we draw close to you. We thank you for your presence. God, we thank you that you are with us, that you love us. Lord, we pray that you would just help us to hear from you, to hear your very voice in our lives, God. Speak to us today. Amen.

So we're going to be looking at three things that the Holy Spirit does in our lives and particularly focusing on getting to know God for the very first time, putting our faith in him. And some of those things are, well, all of them are good. These three things that we're going to look at, all of them are good things that God does, but some of them are challenging things too. We're going to start with something that is challenging, something that is hard. The very first thing we see, the Holy Spirit do in us is very good, but very challenging. And I was thinking, what else in life is like that?

And it's a bit of a rubbish analogy, but exercise. Look at you sporty people out there. Exercise. People that get up early to go to the gym. We know it's good for us, don't we? But it's very hard.

[3 : 5 1] It's very challenging. Eating spinach. That was another one. Does anyone here like spinach? I mean, it's meant to be very good for you, but it's disgusting, isn't it? I mean, it's so slimy.

It's very hard. Very disgusting. These are not really very good analogies, are they, for how the Holy Spirit works in us. But sometimes the Spirit does things in our lives that are difficult, that are challenging for us. And we're going to look at something. First of all, the Bible calls it the word conviction. Conviction. And it's maybe a word we've heard of, but we might not be sure what it really means.

Conviction. It might be a word you've heard of in life, but not in terms of the Bible and what it means here. So we're going to look at this word conviction to start off. So we are, first of all, looking at one verse from John's Gospel. I tried to put the verses in earlier, but we had a laptop failure, so I don't know if it'll work. Dan, if you want to get it, it's John chapter 16, and it's verses 7 and 8. If you've got a Bible, you might want to have a little look.

Okay, so just a bit of context. We've read these verses a little bit recently because it's Jesus introducing to his disciples who the Holy Spirit is. So if we're going to be learning who the Holy Spirit is, we need to look at these verses together. And he's talking to his disciples and preparing them for a time when he won't be with them anymore, when he won't be walking and talking with them 24-7.

And you can imagine, if you were one of the disciples, you would think, that's pretty awful, isn't it? To imagine Jesus not being there anymore is a pretty awful thought. And although they imagine it to be like that, remarkably, Jesus says that actually it'll be even better for them, even better if he is to go, because he's promising another one who will come to walk and talk with them. Not physically like he did, but spiritually. And it's the Holy Spirit. He's promising the Holy Spirit. In the Bible I was reading this morning, in the ESV, it calls, he calls the Holy Spirit the helper, which I think is a wonderful name. I think in NIV it calls him the advocate. And importantly for us today, we're going to look at verse 7 and verse 8. Jesus says, I will send him to you. I will send the Holy Spirit to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment. You might have heard that word convict, conviction, convicted in that verse.

[6 : 31] And the word convict, for me, it reminds me, if you say it a bit different, if you say a convict, sounds like an American kind of prisoner or something, doesn't it? But it reminds you of being of a prisoner in jail, that picture in your mind. And that's kind of helpful actually, because the Bible describes that life can be a bit like that sometimes. And for all of us, it's true, life can be like that. All of the stuff that we say and stuff that we do, and even the stuff that we think that is hurtful or damaging or distracting or addictive, anything that draws us away from God rather than towards God. The Bible calls that sin. And sin ties us up. Sin holds us back.

Sin puts us in chains like a prisoner. So to think of that word being a convict is kind of like a helpful picture almost. That sin can bind us up and chain us up like we're in prison. And Jesus says that the Holy Spirit has come to each and every person, because he says to the world, so not just to us, but to everybody, to convict us, to challenge us, to shine a light, to speak truth into our lives of the reality that we are guilty. We are guilty of sin. And if we're living in sin, we're living in chains that are holding us and holding us back.

Now, how does the Holy Spirit convict us? I think the main way that the Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin is when we hear the gospel, when we hear the gospel, when we hear the truth of the gospel, and whether that's for the first time or many times over. When I'm saying the word gospel, if you don't know what I mean, there's a great, it's lots of things, but there's a great definition that someone called Tim Keller says. Tim Keller was a pastor and preacher, and he puts the gospel like this.

We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe. Yet at the very same time, we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope.

So the Holy Spirit shines a light on our lives. And he shines a light on the hidden stuff, the sin and the guilt that we have. And he also illuminates the gospel of Jesus. He shines a light on who Jesus is and all that he's done for us. And there's an example of this in the Bible. One that I'll share with you quickly is in the book of Acts. You might know the apostle Peter. He was speaking to a group of people. And basically, this group of people had led Jesus to the cross. They basically said, Jesus is guilty. We want him to go to the cross. We want him to die. And it's shameful. But Peter was speaking to this large group of people, and he told them the truth. Well, yeah, Jesus did die, but not for long. He was risen from the grave. He came back to life. And as he was speaking to them, as he was saying in these words, it says that the people were cut to the heart. They were cut to the heart.

[9 : 58] And I think this is the Holy Spirit at work. This is what the Holy Spirit does. The Holy Spirit was turning Peter's words, which are just human words, into a supernatural changing of the heart.

And you can see that their hearts were changed because then they cried out, well, what should we do? They knew they were guilty. They knew they had done something terrible. And they called up, what should we do? And Peter said, this is what you need to do. You need to repent, to turn away from your sin and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. The Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin. The Holy Spirit leads us to look at Jesus and be amazed at the gospel of Christ, that forgiveness is a free gift from God, that we can turn away from our old life and turn towards him. And today, there'll be an opportunity at the end where we'll have some time, you know, time, just stillness and quiet. And it might be that you put your faith in Jesus for the very first time.

So for each of us, for every one of us, for the whole world, the Holy Spirit is convicting of sin. He's shining a light on our lives. But thankfully, that's not all. So number two, I just want to share this. That the Holy Spirit can birth new life in us. The Holy Spirit can birth new life in us.

The Bible says that we've talked about sin quite a lot, but you know, it causes us to be guilty. Sin is stuff we've done that is wrong, that's turning us away from God. And it puts us in chains like a prisoner. But the Bible also says that the effect of sin in our lives is that actually it leads to death, spiritual death. On our own, we can't do anything to change that. We have not got the power to change that. One image that the Bible gives that I think is really helpful is for when we are far from God, separated from God. The Bible says that we have a heart of stone. It's a really good picture, isn't it?

It's from the book of Ezekiel in the Old Testament. A heart of stone. Just think about that for a moment. What does that really mean to have a heart of stone? Is it a metaphor? I should know I'm a teacher.

[12 : 32] It's a picture, isn't it? So it's not reality. It's not a stone heart, but it's telling a story about what your heart is like. It's cold. It's hard. It's resistant to God. I wonder if that resonates with you at all. Maybe times in your life, maybe before you came to know Jesus, you can remember that, that you were turned away from him. You had a cold heart, a heart of stone.

Well, the good news is, Ezekiel then explains the promise of God. And the promise is this. God says, actually, I'll give you a new heart and I'll put a new spirit in you. I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. It's a beautiful promise, isn't it? From a heart of stone, which is cold and hard and resistant to God. So a heart of flesh, which is warm and tender and open and receptive to God. And how does it, it's a miracle, isn't it? How does this miracle happen?

Well, we see in scripture that the Holy Spirit is at the centre of this transformation of your heart from stone to flesh. In John chapter three, maybe we could have these verses, Dan.

John chapter three, from verse three to verse six. And again, if you've got a Bible, you might need to look at it. Jesus talks about this transformation of your heart, the transformation of your life.

He says, very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are, does it say, born again. Those are the key words, unless they are born again. Verse five and six, Jesus says, very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the spirit.

[14 : 32] The spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the spirit gives birth to spirit. It's a little bit confusing, isn't it? So let's explore it for a moment. What does Jesus mean in these verses? Well, spiritually, each of us need to let go of our old lives and let God bring new life to us. That's what's being called being born again, being born again. And Jesus says that we must be born of water and the spirit. Sounds a bit weird. Now, in this passage here, water is symbolizing cleansing, cleaning us up. Jesus is actually pointing back to a promise that we looked at already in Ezekiel.

In Ezekiel 36, it says here, God says, I'll sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean. It's talking about cleansing. I will cleanse you from your impurities and from all of your idols.

Because sin defiles us. Sin makes us dirty. Sin changes us in all the wrong ways. But Jesus offers us cleansing. It's like the old gospel song, Oh Happy Day. You might have seen it on Sister Act, stuff like that. Oh Happy Day. Jesus washed, he washed my sins away.

Paul says something really similar when he's speaking to Titus in the New Testament. And it's Titus 3 verses 4 to 6. If you want to look at it, it might come up. Titus 3 verse 4 to 6. It says, When the kindness and love of God our saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we've done, but because of his mercy. And this bit's really important. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our saviour. Again, we see that cleansing. And then we see the work of the Spirit bringing new life. And maybe today you want to ask Jesus to forgive you of your sin.

You want to ask Jesus to wash you clean. The promises of these scriptures is that the Holy Spirit will renew us, will give us new life. Now in the verses we saw, it was Jesus was speaking to someone called Nicodemus. Nicodemus, I think Mike spoke about it a little bit last week. Nicodemus was like a leading Jewish ruler of the time. And Jesus is showing him, do you know, your new life in God, it can't be man-made. It can't be earned. There's no way you can deserve it. It's not a right or a privilege based on who you are, your background, your upbringing. This new life is a gift from God. It's a gift from God and it's open to everybody. So the invitation for us is to come and receive the life of the Holy Spirit, which is truly life. So two things we've seen so far, the Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin and the Holy Spirit can birth new life in us. Now, the last one, thirdly, and this is a bit of a funny one actually. It's something that I've never quite understood from scripture, but as I've been reading it and I hope they'll explain it well enough that all of us will get a sense of it. Number three, the Holy Spirit puts his stamp on us forever. The Holy Spirit puts his stamp on us forever.

[18 : 22] Now, we've just got back from a little holiday. So yesterday we got back from, I say a holiday, we do it all the time. We go and see my folks down in Durham, which is where I'm from, in England, and we always do the same things. Like whenever we go there, there's like a list of five things we do. We do the same things every time. And one of the things our kids love to do is to go to this wildlife park type thing, like a tropical place. It's got animals and lizards and birds that try and land on your head and all that stuff. And on the way in, you go up to the counter and you pay your money and they stamp your hand. You know those, I think I brought one with me, I've forgotten, like a little ink stamp thing. And it's so that you can come and go. It shows that you've paid and that you can come and go, maybe head off to the cafe if you've had enough of the lizards and stuff.

So we all got stamped, we had our nice time and we went home. Now the next day, we were sitting around having our dinner and we were looking at our stamps, I can't remember why, but mine and Shara's were like pretty much clean, gone. The kids, they were really bright still. I was like, what's happened here? Ah, washing hands. Maybe we need to work on that in our house. Theirs were good as new and ours have completely disappeared. But now back home, everybody's stamps have gone. You know, they've all been washed away, they're done for. But the Bible speaks of a stamp that God puts on our lives.

When we put our trust in him for the very first time, he puts a stamp on our lives that will never fade, that will never spoil, that will never disappear. And we read about this in a few different places in the New Testament. And here's just one verse for us. It's from Ephesians 1, 13.

Ephesians 1, 13. And Paul here is writing to the church in Ephesus. And he says this, you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation.

When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit. Now, to kind of understand this, we need to know that in the time where Paul was writing, people would have used seals a lot more. So it would have been made of wax or clay or some kind of soft metal. And it would be placed onto a document or some kind of item to show who owned it, to show that it was authentic in some way. You know, you'd seal a letter. Some people maybe still do that wax seal or something like that. And that's what it was used for. That's why Paul uses the word seal. And for us, it's maybe like, we don't know what that means, but it made sense to people his writing to. Well, in the life of a Christian, Paul says someone who's believed the gospel, someone who is in Christ, the Holy Spirit marks us. Not physically, not like the ink stamp on my hand that's disappeared, but spiritually. He marks us spiritually. His mark on our lives shows that we belong to God and that he is at work in us. And this mark will not fade. It will not disappear. It won't spoil. It won't grow faint. Also, this seal in the Bible can be understood to mean that the Holy Spirit is protecting us, that he's preserving us. It has all these kind of meanings to do with that.

[22 : 04] Now, I think this is really encouraging, particularly for you. If you have recently become a Christian, you know, the seal of God says that you now belong to him. You belong to God and he will always be with you.

It's a really encouraging thing. You know, I was chatting to Ian earlier and I was just saying, I'm going to share this in the message, that those of us who've been Christians for many years can tell you that life doesn't get easier. You know, we still face all the challenges of life.

We're talking about like hospital appointments, you know, sickness, stuff like that. Financial problems, relationship fallouts, all this stuff, it happens. But we can know that God has put his seal on us and that is one thing that will not change. Nothing can remove the seal of God on our lives. And it's such a great assurance if you are starting out in your journey with Jesus knowing that God has put his seal upon you. For those of us who are at the opposite end of the spectrum, if you've been a Christian for a while, I just want to shortly finish with something for us.

I just want a bit of encouragement that the Holy Spirit who puts his seal upon you is the same Holy Spirit who is at work in your life day by day by day. And recently I read a testimony, a story from a Christian woman called Sarah Edwards. She lived 300 years ago, so it's quite old, but it's fantastic.

It's really encouraging. And she spoke about her just every day with God, you know. Maybe as a new believer, you start out and everything's fresh and new. When you've been doing it for 10 or 20 or 30 years, actually you get into hopefully good habits and routines that nurture your spiritual life each day.

[24 : 00] And that's what she was doing. She was talking about how she used to meditate on God's Word and how the Holy Spirit worked in her through that. I'll just share some of her words.

This is what she said. When I was alone, the words of Scripture came to mind with great power and sweetness. I had no more doubts of it than I had of my own being. I cannot find language to express how certain this appeared. My safety and happiness and eternal enjoyment of God's love seemed as durable and unchangeable as God himself. Melted and overcome by the sweetness of this assurance, I fell into a great flow of tears.

The presence of God was so near and so real that I seemed scarcely conscious of anything else. It's a lovely testimony, isn't it? It's a lovely story of how God can just impact an individual, just in a very normal, everyday way. But this was her experience of putting in that practice of reading God's Word and of meditating on it. And it's not to say that the Holy Spirit affected her like that every time. I'm sure that didn't happen. But it's true that the Holy Spirit longs to assure us and to comfort us that the Holy Spirit's love for us. Now, just in summary, we've seen three things.

That the Holy Spirit, firstly, convicts us of our sin and our need for God. Secondly, that the Holy Spirit can birth new life in us. And lastly, that the Holy Spirit puts his stamp on us forever.

And we're going to just finish. We're going to finish with a bit of time of stillness. And Luke's going to help just by playing a bit of music to help us. I always find that, you know, when it's super quiet, you start to hear everything. You start to hear the fan. You start to hear the person next to you breathing.

[26 : 19] So a bit of music can be helpful. And I'd just love to give us an opportunity to respond to God. And more than anything, I'd love for the Holy Spirit to be at work here. So you can sit. If you want to stand, you can stand. For me, sometimes I find it helpful to put my hands out just to, you know, we were talking about the heart of flesh, you know, being open to God. It just helps me to do that. You don't need to do that. And I just want you to invite you to be open to God. Maybe this is the first time you've actually opened up your heart to God. Or maybe this is part of who you are. This is part of your relationship with God. You regularly spend time just being still before him. And that's a great thing.

Lord, we just welcome you. God, come and be amongst us, God.

God, come and be amongst us, God.

Just invite us each to think about the things that were shared this afternoon. Number one, a conviction of sin. Perhaps you realize there is sin in your life. And that instead of turning towards it and indulging it and giving it time, you just need to turn away from it today. You need to make that decision in partnership with the Spirit of God to turn away from sin.

Perhaps you want to open yourself up to the wonderful life of the Spirit, that he would fill you with his life. And if you're not a Christian, we learned today about being born again, putting your trust in him and having that life flow through you.

[28 : 44] And finally, we talked about the Holy Spirit putting his stamp on you.

And I'd love just to speak to people here who maybe feel, maybe two things. Maybe you feel far from God. God. Well, the Spirit has put his stamp on you. That has happened. That's a fact.

So you might feel far from God, but he's already put his stamp on you. He loves you. He treasures you. He knows you. He comforts you.

Or maybe you just need a bit of assurance actually that God is with you. He has put his stamp on you. His seal.

Thank you, guys. Thank you, guys.

[29 : 56] Thank you.

Lord, we invite you to do wonderful things in our lives, God, that only you can do. You are our life-giving presence. You are God in us.

We thank you, God. Lord, we ask would you do more than we've seen before? More than we've experienced of you. Lord, we thank you for your help in every situation.

Lord, you know exactly what we need. Lord, we thank you, God. Thank you that you fill us with your love and assurance.

Thank you, God. Thank you, God.

[31 : 20] Just encourage you, as we finish, if you would appreciate prayer from anybody, just, you know, please do ask somebody. You can ask me. You can ask someone here.

And someone would love to pray with you. Or it might be that the Spirit of God's been speaking to you about something and you'd like to share that with somebody. Maybe you've got a word for someone or you want to share a scripture with somebody.

That's great. Go for it. Don't let that moment pass.