

# The Spirit and the Church

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Hey everyone, good to see you today. Do I need the microphone or am I okay without? Fine, great! You want the microphone? You happy? You can hear me? Great. Wow, brilliant. Well, really great to be here.

Julie really wanted to be here too and I think like some of your parents probably had to go and pick our teenagers up from the youth weekend away at 3.30 so she's devastated. She's way more fun than me, right?

Don't nod. We're a team, you know, we're together. No, really good to be here and Julie's missing you guys. So good to see you and love being in partnership with you guys and greetings from Kings Edinburgh and everybody knows you there and we're so excited to be on a, I guess, a journey with you in terms of churches together, just wanting to see more churches established in Scotland as part of our New Ground family. Really, really good. So I've been asked today to talk about what it means, I guess, this Holy Spirit series you're doing, what it means to be a church that's filled with the Holy Spirit as a church together and I remember a number of years ago when our son Ben was born and he, I brought him home from hospital or Julie and I did and, you know, it's, I mean, those who had kids, you maybe did the same thing as well. You bring your baby in home and you basically do the induction with him. You know, you go around and you say, this is where you're going to sleep and this is, this is your room which we've decorated nicely for you and this is your brother and this is your brother and this is your sister and this is our house. This is where you're going to make your milk, this is where we're going to make the food, all of that stuff. But here's the thing, we were bringing him home and there's something about home, isn't there? When we think about home or sing about home, it can be a powerful thing. I mean, I've never really understood the story of Les Misérables, but I do know there's a song in it which I just love belting out whenever they do it.

Bring him home and I think whoever that guy is, I want him to come home. Or if you're an England fan, you dream that one day you're going to bring it home, am I right?

Now, here's what we're talking about today. The church of Jesus is, it's God's home. It's the place that he dwells by his spirit and we're going to be looking at that today. And I've got two questions I'm going to ask you, both from the Bible. The first one is this, 1 Corinthians 3.16 says, don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in your midst?

[ 2 : 5 1 ]     It's a question from the Apostle Paul to the Corinthian church and also to our church here today. Don't you know? It's a knowledge question. It's a question about have you understood something correctly? And that answer comes from the Bible, from God's word. Okay, next slide please. This question is this, have you experienced, did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? Acts chapter 19.

So these two questions I want us to think about this afternoon in Kings West Slothian. Do we know, have we understood what the Bible says, and are we experiencing the Holy Spirit? We need both the word and the spirit. As Christians, we can even have a tendency to prefer one over the other. But somebody wisely once said, if you have the word without the spirit, you dry up. And if you have the spirit without the word, you blow up. And if you have word and spirit, you grow up. So Kings West Slothian, let's be a word and spirit church today as we look at scripture and seek to experience more of the spirit. So here's the first question we're going to talk about then. Do you know, don't you know rather, that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in your midst? The power of a negative question. It's different, isn't it? So let's say your spouse or your friend says to you, they say, are you going to wear that shirt tonight? That's very different than saying, you're not going to wear that shirt tonight. You see, one is inquisitive and the other is reminding and even chastising. Or if you say to one of your children, are you going to leave your socks on the floor again? Rather than you're not going to leave your socks on the floor again. It's a different nuance, isn't it? So when Paul says, don't you know that you are God's temple and God's spirit lives in you? He's saying, he's saying with a reminding kind of tone.

It's addressing complacency, forgetfulness or misunderstanding. Paul is addressing a fundamental, he thinks every Christian should have drilled into them from the earliest stage in their Christian journey, that they together are the temple of God. What does he mean by that? Well, he means first of all that this is about a people, not a place. When you think about the temple, you're thinking about a place, but Paul's saying no, actually you. In fact, in the NIV, it says you yourselves. The word yourselves doesn't appear in the original language. It's just the NIV doesn't have a good English kind of word to describe you as a plural, as in more than one person. We do actually have that version in Scotland, don't we? It's just yous. He says, don't yous know that you are God's temple and God's spirit lives in you. I also speak American, y'all. He says, don't y'all know, don't yous know, or if you're posh NIV English, it's don't you yourselves know. He's just trying, they're just trying, this is what the language is saying, that together you are something remarkable.

You are the dwelling place of God. In our highly individualistic culture, we can be all about our individual experiences of God, me and Jesus, me and Jesus. I remember chatting to a remarkable person once who came to Kings and they had incredible stories.

And they were saying about guidance, about God speaking, about miracles and prophetic. And I said, I must get a coffee with you because I'd love you to join our church. And I got a coffee and they told me yet more remarkable stories. I said, would you join our church? Because God's, and they said, oh no, we don't believe in church.

[ 6 : 56 ] Oh no, it's just me and Jesus, me and Jesus. I'm on a journey with Jesus. I said, oh, what a shame because you're missing out on this truth that together we are God's temple. It's not just about you and me. But he uses this word temple. Now here's a word that probably didn't appear in our worship time today. And it certainly didn't appear in Kings in Edinburgh in our worship time today.

Nobody said, thank you, Lord, we are the temple. Because kind of, I guess in a place where they would have perhaps remembered or had in their sort of understanding, this giant temple in Jerusalem, which was built as a dwelling place for God, for God to be among them. There was one temple in Jerusalem. It was the center of all things in Judaism and still is today. Solomon built it as a place for God to live among his people. And I love it. In 2 Chronicles 6, Solomon finished the temple, which I love in itself because it's a story of somebody finishing something, which is an inspiration to me because I never, ever finish anything. I thought, wow, he finished it. And he prayed this prayer in 2 Chronicles 6, verse 18. He says, but will God really dwell on earth with humans?

The heavens, even the highest heavens cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built. Here's the prayer of one of the greatest kings who ever lived. And he said, I've built the best temple money can buy. And here's my honest admission. When it's finally complete, he says, how on earth are you supposed to put God in a box? He's vast. He's beyond our fathoming. And yet God chose to come because we read this about that moment. It says, when the priests withdrew from the holy place, the cloud filled the temple of the Lord. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled his temple. God's presence, this cloud of glory filled the temple because God chose it as his dwelling place. In fact, you could track God's human dwelling place all through the history of the Old Testament if you looked at it from that angle. Where do you think the first dwelling place of God was in the Bible? Anybody?

Genesis. Yeah, yes. Did he say that? I couldn't really hear that. Sorry. Yeah, God walked with Adam and Eve in the garden. It was the place where he walked and talked. What a place. Adam and Eve blew it.

They got evicted from the garden. There's another man called Enoch, and he walked with God, and then God took him away. But he walked with God. God appeared to Moses at a burning bush, and he said, I'm the Lord. He instructed Moses to lead the people of Israel, and he said, I want you to build a tabernacle for me, which was like a tent in the desert. And he says, God said, I will dwell among them.

[10:15] And God's presence was demonstrated by a fiery, cloudy pillar. And as they built this tent, God's presence would rest over the top of it. And when that fiery, cloudy pillar would move on, they'd pack up the tent, and they'd follow the cloudy pillar around, because it was following God's presence wherever he went.

It's always been in the start of time, because it's like in Genesis, when it's got, God saved the world, and the Spirit breathed over there, the waters and that. So could you say it was from the very start of time, that the breath of God was there, that God saved the water being?

Yes, no, the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters in Genesis 1. And yeah, so you could track it right back to then as well. And then at these different points in history, God's dealing, how does he dwell with human beings like us? I think that's the thing I'm trying to draw our attention to in these verses. What does it look like for God to dwell with human beings? And usually through our own sinfulness, we push God's Spirit away. And the question is, well, what does it look like for God to dwell with us? That tabernacle, that tent became a temple built by Solomon. But even that wasn't that permanent. If you go to it now, it's a ruin in the middle of Jerusalem. And that came about because it was impossible for Israel to follow this God. In fact, Isaiah 66 verse 1, after God has evicted them from the land and the temple has been destroyed, it says this, God says, this is what the Lord says, heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you'll build for me? Where will my resting place be? They got evicted from the land. The temple was destroyed.

They thought they had God in a box. And God reminded them they were so wrong. Do you know what this creature is? It's a hermit crab. And here's the remarkable thing about hermit crabs, which I think I must have learned this during lockdown when I was doing sort of science with one of my kids or something, that they don't have a shell of their own. They basically swap it. Every little while they grow a bit and they discard their old shell. They basically borrow somebody else's shell. And if you've got the next slide up, please, here we go.

And sadly, in these days of sort of plastic waste and stuff in the oceans, you know, they'll just find anything basically to be their shell and plastic caps or shells or whatever that is. It's almost, this is the picture we have of God going through the Bible. He's saying, well, I'm going to live in Eden, but that was going to be temporary. Or he's going to live in a tabernacle in the wilderness, a tent, but that was temporary. Or a temple in Jerusalem, but that was temporary. Where is the house that we will build for God? When Israel got scattered, they built synagogues, a place to teach the Bible and build community. But that was very different to the temple. It was just almost a reminder that they weren't at the temple. And then Jesus comes on the scene and in John chapter one, he says, the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. Literally, he tented it. He made his tabernacle among us. Jesus was God in a human body, in the tent of a human body. We can see why the disciples felt bereft when Jesus said that he was leaving them. But then God promised them another comforter, the Holy Spirit. And in Acts chapter two, we have that remarkable moment where God comes to an upper room full of believers. Now, the temple was probably just along the street, but this was God announcing that this was his new temple. This is his new people. This is his new way of filling the human race with his presence, with a group of 120 believers in an upper room. This is Paul's reminder to every congregation that you are God's temple and his spirit. And his spirit dwells in you. You are the people of God. You are the home to the person of God the Spirit. Whenever you gather, you're not a synagogue. You're not on our post of something better. You are it. We're not just here to learn a bit about the Bible and have some community together.

[ 14 : 50 ] We're here because God has chosen us to be his dwelling place here in West Lothian, together with every church that is faithful to him. Now, the question I ask is, well, this question that Paul asks, he says, don't you know that you're God's temple and God's spirit lives in you? I wonder why Paul asked that question. Interesting, isn't it? You think, well, why is he going on about that in that particular moment? Well, he's actually addressing some things that would diminish the temple of God, the people of God, from being the dwelling place of God. He's actually addressing divisions and immaturity in the church. Do you know that's the enemy of every church? In that context, they were choosing favorite leaders, Paul, Apollos, Cephas. They were getting divided in their unity. They were applying the limits of human wisdom to spiritual problems. And in doing so, they were almost making light of the fact that this is God's dwelling place. This is his home. We need to do what he says. Disunity, pride, and jealousy damage the place where God dwells. So because God treasures his dwelling place, he takes exception to the one who acts in a destructive way to his church.

So this is it. You're it. Isn't this good news? Is this encouraging? Say, I'm it. Say, we're it. You're not I'm. Say, we're it. Great. So why? What? What then? What does this temple look like? What does the manifestation of God's glory? In the Old Testament, they had a glory cloud that filled it and a fire, a fiery thing. What does it look like for God to fill his church?

The manifestations of the Spirit are as God determines. So in the Bible, we'll read about a burning bush or a fourth man in a fiery furnace or a cloudy pillar of fire or even God coming as a baby wrapped in cloths. We must be careful that when we talk about the manifestations of God's glory that we don't always just think it's powwow. Amazing. Oh, spectacular, spectacular. Sometimes it's in the gentleness of a baby being born as God among us. How does God show himself to his temple, his church?

Well, I think there's three kind of ways. Acts 2, we just read this one. In this moment, there was physical manifestations. There was fire and there was wind. I don't think I've ever seen or experienced that myself. In fact, you could argue, well, that was for a certain moment in that particular thing. It was God's Spirit coming for the first time, the day of Pentecost.

But we mustn't put God in a box. If God wants to do physical things, if God wants to blow or show us things about himself, we think, well, please, Lord, we don't go looking for those things.

[ 17 : 54 ] But he's God. He'll do what he wants to do. But here's the second way that God seems to delight to come to his temple, his church. We read in 1 Corinthians 12, verse 7. Paul's talking about a worship meeting, a bit like this.

And he says, Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom. To another a message of knowledge by the means of the same Spirit. To another faith by the same Spirit. To another gifts of healing by that one Spirit. To another miraculous powers. To another prophecy. To another distinguishing between spirits. To another speaking in different kinds of tongues. And still to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of the one and the same Spirit as he distributes them to each one just as he determines.

God seems to delight to manifest. It's that temple language. Through the gifts of the Spirit being evidenced in community together. And just when you read through that, we could do a whole sermon series on these gifts. That doesn't seem, Paul doesn't seem to be that interested in it. The main point he's making is this, you know, when you gather guys, we can expect all of these things to happen and more. So we can expect that somebody might speak in tongues and somebody might interpret and somebody might prophesy and somebody might get healed. And somebody might bring a word of wisdom or a word of knowledge or somebody might be discerning something. And he says, I'm not going to explain what these all are. He says, but I do want to remind you that this is what it looks like when we worship God in community together.

Pursue these things if we're to be the temple of God. Here's the third way that God manifests himself in the community of God's people.

It's through Spirit-enabled character. Next slide, please. Sorry, just go back one, actually. Just sort of like a parachute game. I think this is what I think worship is meant to look like.

[ 20 : 15 ] We're all holding a corner of the sheet. And God's Spirit is filling us. And the balls are rolling back and forth to different ones of us. And God is using every person.

Sorry, next one. So, Spirit-enabled character. So, Galatians chapter 6. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Fruit, that's kind of manifestation, isn't it? That's saying this is something else that the Spirit's doing. This is what it looks like in church community to be practicing and growing in these remarkable fruits.

In everything we do. Let me ask you the question. Do you believe it?

Do you know it? Don't you know that you are God's temple and God's Spirit lives in you? This is what we've been talking about.

[ 21 : 16 ] This is what we've been teaching. He lives among his people. And when we worship, he will come and make himself known to us. Okay, just in these final few moments then.

Question two. I said there was two questions, didn't I? So, that was the first question. Don't you know? Do you know now? Okay, good. Question two. Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?

Here's the question first. Are we experiencing God in this kind of way? Let's just read these verses from Acts chapter 19 where this verse appears, this question.

While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?

They said, no, we haven't even heard there's a Holy Spirit. Good start. So, Paul said, then what baptism did you receive? John's baptism, they replied. Paul said, John's baptism was a baptism of repentance.

[ 22 : 20 ] He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus. On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Paul placed his hands on them, and the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.

There were about 12 men in all. They all received the gift of the Holy Spirit. There's a lot in that story that we can't unpack today, but Paul is fascinated when he comes across a group of people that aren't evidencing and overflowing with the life of the Holy Spirit.

And so, he makes sure the foundations are in place. He makes sure they're Christians, and then he prays for them. And here's the thing. All 12 of them start speaking in tongues.

You don't have to speak in tongues to be a Christian. You don't have to speak in tongues to be filled with the Spirit. But on that occasion, they all experience the Holy Spirit together. Now, in any gathering like this, there's always at least a few people that say, oh, yeah, but that kind of stuff doesn't happen for me.

When I get prayed for, it doesn't happen. But do you know what? There was people like that in that group as well. And God came to them anyway.

[ 23 : 36 ] God loves to fill his people, his church, with the Holy Spirit, and for us to experience that. So, let me give you, as we wrap up, and then I'd love us to have a moment where we can just pray together to receive more of God's presence and to hunger for it.

Let me give you the word glory, G-L-O-R-Y. And here's five things that perhaps you and I can do to be those who pursue what it is to be God's household, God's temple, the dwelling place for his Spirit.

So, here's the first one. Go for it. G. Go for it. Secondly, L, listen carefully.

In any gathering, I find it just so helpful sometimes to quieten myself and say, as well as singing the songs, to say, Lord, are you speaking? Are you speaking to me?

And are you speaking to me so that others could be encouraged? And I'll just listen. I'll try to be sensitive to his Spirit. Or maybe he's got a scripture he wants me to focus in on and read out.

[ 25 : 12 ] The next step is really important. Oh, obey promptly. How often do I find? I'll be thinking, oh, maybe I should share that.

And then I think, well. And then somebody else shares the exact same thing that I was going to share. I thought, I was going to say that. And then God says, well, no, you weren't actually. That's why I told somebody else. Obey promptly.

When you feel led to speak, pray or act. Respond quickly and humbly. Trust that God knows what he's doing. Put yourself beyond the point of no return. Ah, read the room.

Not every word is always right in the exact moment to share it. That's why it's good in a gathered community to maybe come and chat to whoever's leading the meeting. Or Mike or whoever it is. And just say, this is what I'm feeling God's saying.

Does that fit right now? And if somebody says, yeah, great, that's it. You've got no excuse. You just go for it. And if somebody says, you know what? Actually, that sounds really great. But maybe God's doing some other things at the moment.

[ 26 : 07 ] Then you can share that at a different moment. Or be pleased that you were being responsive and obedient to God anyway. And lastly, why?

Yearn for more. If we're to be the temple of God filled with his presence and demonstrating his presence, we must keep saying, more, Lord. Even those gifts we read earlier, as I read them, I thought, Lord, I'd love to see so many more of these.

I'd love to see so many more healings. I'd love to see so many more prophecies and tongues and interpretations and miracles. Let's hunger and be a community where such things become more regular as we yearn for more.

So let's be a church that yearns for more. Let's ask for his presence to fill us. And I think it would be good just to take a few minutes just now to just ask him to fill us again.

Would that be okay? Okay. So I don't know, Dan, if you could just play a little bit of gentle music in the background, that would be wonderful. And just, could we stand? Would that be okay?

[ 27 : 13 ] I mean, there's no magic about standing or sitting. If you're more comfortable sitting, that's fine. But, you know, faith comes through hearing.

And hearing by the word of God. And we've actually heard and just reminded ourselves today that God has chosen us to be his dwelling place.

We're not a synagogue. We're a temple.

We're not a synagogue. We're a temple. So I'm just going to invite God, the Holy Spirit, to come and show himself to us afresh.

Spirit of God, we just invite you into your home, into your place.

[ 28 : 17 ] Thank you. Thank you. This is our place, Lord. We've found such joy and community and family here. But we thank you most of all. It's your place. It's the place where you dwell.

So, Holy Spirit, would you just come and fill us again? Thank you. It's not about us. It's about you. This is the place you love to be.

So, Lord, come and bring your gifts. Come and bring your presence. Come and be very at home among us. And please, Lord, would you make us Kings West Lothian, a church that longs for more of you.

In every gathering, every small group, every meeting. Lord, we pray for an overflow of gifts of the Holy Spirit, as you promised.