

The Gift of the Holy Spirit

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Have you personally received the Holy Spirit? Have you personally received the Holy Spirit? Now to make it a little clearer to all of us, maybe I should say, I am not asking you if you've been filled with the Holy Spirit. I understand we all have various ideas about that-- being filled with the Holy Spirit or being baptized with the Holy Spirit. Some of us think that occurs all in one "ball of wax" as we say in America. We get the whole "ball of wax" at once when we become Christians. Some of us feel that way and that's all right. Others of us feel no, you're baptized with the Holy Spirit two years, maybe three years after you've become a Christian. But I am not asking that, loved ones.

I am asking, have you received the Holy Spirit -- just received Him? Maybe you're not filled with Him, maybe you're not baptized with Him, but have you received the Holy Spirit personally? You may say, "Well, I'm a Christian and of course I've received the Holy Spirit. I must have, mustn't I? I am a Christian and regarded as a disciple of Christ and so I take it I have received the Holy Spirit."

Loved ones, there are examples in the New Testament of people who were regarded as disciples, actually as Christian disciples, and yet they had not received the Holy Spirit. Why I am sharing this with you is not to "get at you" and prove that you're not really a Christian. But I think that many of you who are Christians feel you lack something in your Christian life. Often when I share with you the victorious life -- victory over anger, envy and jealousy and I talk to you about dying with Christ, or being filled with the Holy Spirit and having victory over sin of all kinds --some of you who believe you are Christians, just wilt like withered flowers when you hear that message.

You just think, "Oh no, I can't be that. You want me to try more. You want me to try to overcome my sin. Oh pastor, I love you and I want to be that but I can't. I can't work up the strength to do it." When this message that we can be delivered from self and from the power of sin is preached to us, many of us who think of ourselves as Christians find that instead of a rising in our hearts to it there is a heaviness.

Now, here's the point. When you have received the Holy Spirit; even if you're just a little child in God, even if you are only a little baby in Jesus, even if that happened only yesterday, when you receive the Holy Spirit at conversion, and someone comes along and preaches this glorious victory over even inward anger and jealousy, the Holy Spirit within you rises to that. He rises to that because He knows He is able to bring that about in your life and so you sense a rising to it.

You sense an inability too but the rising is stronger than the inability. And even though you may feel at times terrible and the conviction of sin may get unbearable yet always there'll be that bright little light inside you that will keep saying, "Yes, yes, but I can do it in you. I can do it through you."

Now, if you haven't received the Holy Spirit when you were born of God, if you have got into some kind of half baked experience and you haven't received the Holy Spirit, then when somebody like me preaches victory over sin and the baptism with the Holy Spirit and the fullness of the Holy Spirit and victory over inward anger, jealousy and envy, then there'll be no rising in your heart. You'll just valiantly and bravely feel (because you love me or you've listened for so many Sundays), "Well,

I ought to try to do that." But on the whole, it'll be a depressing message to you.

On the whole, you'll feel, "Oh, I couldn't. I can hardly make it as I am over outward sin and now you're talking about inward sin?" Now, do you see that? That's why I am sharing this with you, so that you'll know where you are. There were people in the New Testament who were regarded as Christian disciples, thought of themselves as Christian disciples, and hadn't received the Holy Spirit. Let me show you where they are mentioned in Acts 19:1-6.

"While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. And he said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' And they said, 'No, we have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.' And he said, 'Into what then were you baptized?' They said, 'Into John's baptism.' And Paul said, 'John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.' On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them; and they spoke with tongues and prophesied."

That was the baptism with the Holy Spirit that they came into. But the point was that they hadn't even received the Holy Spirit in any form before that.

So it seems to me, many of us are like that. Whether we've to go on and be baptized with the Holy Spirit and filled with the Holy Spirit all at once or whether we have to go on and just receive the Holy Spirit and then walk for a year or so until we're filled with the Holy Spirit, many of us are in the same position as these people were in regard to the Holy Spirit. We haven't really received the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Now, some of us get confused because we think, "Yes, but we have gone through some of the things that are connected with Christian conversion." Maybe you'd look back to that chapter that Leighton read in the New Testament lesson. It's Acts 2:38 and you get there the clear direction given after the very first Christian sermon that was ever preached. It was the first direction as to how you become a Christian. I think some of us have gone through some of these things.

And Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." It seems to me that there are many of us here that have in some sense repented. You see there are five elements here if you notice. There's repentance, there's being baptized, there's in the name of Jesus Christ, there's the forgiveness of sins and there's the gift of the Holy Spirit. And many of us I think have come through some of those things. Many of us have repented in some sense. Many of us have been baptized either as children or even as adults in Baptist churches. Or we've been confirmed in some way.

Some of us have believed in the name of Jesus Christ. Some of us have experienced the forgiveness of our sins. But could it be that some of us have not received the gift of the Holy Spirit? In other words, could it be that you have come through some of the experiences that involve becoming a Christian but you have not entered into the vital one, which is the gift of the Holy Spirit? That's the new thing. I don't know if you realize it, but all the other things, except for Jesus, (three of the other five elements) were in the Old Covenant. People repented in the Old Covenant. People experienced the forgiveness of their sins in the Old Covenant.

"Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered." (Romans 4:7) Do you

know where that piece comes from? "As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us." It comes from Psalm 103 from the Old Covenant.

So the Old Covenant had an experience of forgiveness of sins. The Old Covenant had an experience of repentance. The Old Covenant even had an experience of some kind of circumcision or baptism. John the Baptist baptized people for the forgiveness of their sins. What the Old Covenant didn't have was Jesus and the Holy Spirit and it's the gift of the Holy Spirit that makes you a Christian.

Now, I wonder why some of us may not have received the gift of the Holy Spirit? Loved ones, I think if you look back to Acts 19, it's because some of us may have entered into this kind of an experience that these people did when Apollos baptized them. You see it in verse 3 of Acts 19.

And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism." (That's the Old Covenant baptism.) And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him," and then Paul adds "that is, Jesus."

But what Apollos did was the same as John. He said, "Repent and God will forgive you your sins. Come down to the river and I'll baptize you in the name of Him who is to come. I'll baptize you in the name of the Messiah who will eventually come and deliver us."

I wonder how many of us here have entered into that kind of general experience of conversion. In other words, Jesus is not very vital to us in our Christian conversion. I'll tell you how it can come about. I think there are many of us who have been brought up in church. We believe all the things that Christians believe. We think they are good. We believe in church and we come to church. We believe in God, and we pray to God. We believe that he oversees all of our lives and that we should try to be like Him, and that's as far as our conversion goes. That's as far as it goes.

We talk about the Lord in everyday life. We'll say, "Oh the Lord did this and the Lord does that." Or, "I think the Lord wants me to do that." Or, "Well, I am trusting the Lord for this." But we don't mean the Lord Jesus Christ who is our personal friend and Savior. We mean generally the Lord, the way they meant him. They were baptized in the name of Him who was to come. We don't know who that is, but we're baptized in the name of Him who is to come. And to us, the Lord is a general term that means God. We are, in fact, theists. That is, we're like many people who aren't particularly Christian. We believe in God, we respect God, we're theists. That's what a theist is. He's a believer in God. But we don't have a personal relationship with Jesus. We don't know Jesus as our dear friend and Jesus is not very vital in our experience.

In other words, we have the experience of repentance, to some extent of baptism or confirmation, and to some extent the forgiveness of our sins. But Jesus is not very real to us and not very vital. When we talk about the Lord, we talk about the Lord in the same way as a follower of Islam would talk about the Lord, or a Buddhist at times will talk about the Lord, or a spiritualist will talk about certain lords. We talk in a general term 'The Lord' but we don't mean the dear Lord Jesus Christ who is our personal friend and Savior whom we know face-to-face.

Now, loved ones I think some of us have come into a general relationship with God that does not involve Jesus in any way. Actually, some of us are in a more subtle position because we were in real trouble at one time with drugs or alcohol, or in real trouble with our marriages or with our careers and we were desperate. We needed to be delivered and we cried out to God in agony, "God, help me!" And God graciously came down and delivered us out of our troubles. So, we have a great sense of

gratitude to God as in some sense our Savior. But Jesus is not dear and personal to us.

It's just in a general sense. We say, "If you knew what God did for me so many years ago, then you'd believe in Him like I do." But it's believing in God as a providential deliverer, not as a Savior from sin and hell. And because Jesus is lacking in our experience, we have not received the gift of the Holy Spirit. See loved ones, it's only if Jesus is dear and precious to you that you receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. He gives the gift of the Holy Spirit personally to you.

Now if you say to me, "Well, brother, how do I come to that?" You come by a real conviction of sin loved ones, that's the only thing. That's the only thing that will drive you to Jesus. That's the only thing that will drive you into his arms -- if you allow the Holy Spirit to convict you deeply of your helplessness and hopelessness before God. I remember doing that. I was so anxious to find reality with God that I just read the Bible and I saw, "Yes, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." That's me and it's you. We've fallen short of God's glory and the wages of sin is death. That's it -- it's death. There's no other solution. There's no other answer to it. Death is the only answer to sin. And if you have failed in even one point of the law, the Bible says, you're guilty of all of it.

Maybe you haven't stolen but you've had unclean thoughts. Then it says, it's as if you have stolen and killed and murdered and everything. So it doesn't matter what little falling short there has been, if you have fallen short at all, you are due death eternally. And you are due the fires of hell. And until you see that, you will not feel that any great change is needed such as Jesus alone can bring. But as you allow the Holy Spirit to begin to convince you that you are a helpless and a hopeless sinner, you'll see that there is no way in which you can please God. It is to "him that worketh not but believeth Him that justifies the ungodly." He will declare your righteousness. Your faith is declared as righteousness. It is only when you see that that God begins to be able to make Jesus real to you.

In other words, you need to see that you are hopeless and helpless. You are shot through with selfishness. Your anger is evidence of a rebellion against God that is deeper than anything you can see. You just want your own way and you determine to trample over anybody to get it. Your life is full of lies, dishonesty, bearing false witness against your neighbor, anger and sarcasm. All those things are sins and God cannot let you into His heaven with those. The only thing He can do with you is destroy you and cast you into hell forever -- unless Jesus has gone there for you.

Loved ones, as you begin to realize that Jesus has gone to hell for you, He has borne your sins in His own body on the tree FOR you, and allowed God, His Father, to destroy those sins in Him, only when you see that, do you grab for Jesus as your only hope in utter self abasing repentance. You grab for Him desperately and say, "Lord Jesus, I'll do anything. I'll get rid of any of the things that have caused your death on Calvary. Show me them and I'll get rid of them." And you turn from yourself utterly and completely.

When you've done that, you realize there's nothing inside because you've turned away from everything that was you. Then it is that Jesus says, "I will give you the Holy Spirit, my counsel. He will come into your heart and will be your Savior from sin in your present life. Receive Him now as you would receive me and begin to attend to Him and listen to Him and obey Him." And as you do that, the Holy Spirit grows and grows within you and becomes more and more real to you.

Loved ones, the Holy Spirit begins to take Jesus' own character and to make it real inside you. The

Holy Spirit is a real person. He isn't just a force. He isn't just an influence. He isn't just what we call you changing your mind. The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Trinity. He comes into your life and He is a real whole person inside you. He has a mind. He has a mind like yours. He has emotions like yours. He has a will like yours. He's a real person inside you. He can give you thoughts that you have not got. He can give you His own desires. He can beget His own wishes in you and as you make room for Him more and more in your life, the Holy Spirit begins to give you the very character of Jesus. And He begins to light that character up for you.

Somebody has said, "The Holy Spirit is the one who takes the things that happened 2000 years ago and He makes them living realities here today in your life." We've used this illustration before but it's like coming into the art gallery in London and seeing all the magnificent paintings around the walls. You come in at night and the custodian says, "Oh, you should see that beautiful painting of Rembrandt there, and the one by Gainsborough. It's magnificent." And you say, "Oh, I wish I could see it but it's dark in here." It's like that.

Before the Holy Spirit is received into your life, you try to imagine the things I talk about regarding the things of God. You try to imagine them and to think that you feel them. You say, "I think I know what that feels like." And then the custodian says, "Wait a minute, I'll turn the lights on." And he turns the lights on and you see all the magnificent paintings for the first time and all the beauty of it thrusts in upon your mind and your eyes.

It's like that when you receive the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit suddenly takes all the magnificent things of God and of Jesus and He makes them real to you. He makes them real so that you'll understand them. Never fear. Don't think it'll just be so that I understand them or somebody else. He knows YOU. He adapts it to your understanding. The Holy Spirit takes the things of Jesus and makes them real to you. He changes your life.

Do you remember the time that Jesus went to a house? I think it was Mary Magdalene, the one who was a prostitute, that came in with a box of perfumed ointment and she washed His feet. You remember they used to wash their feet when they came in from the dusty roads. Then she dried them with her hair and broke the box of ointment to put it on His feet. And then, you remember in John 12 it says, "And the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment."

Now, when we talk about the anointing of the Holy Spirit, or the anointment of the Holy Spirit, that's what He does. He fills your own life with the fragrance of Jesus' beauty and your conscience becomes something sweet and your thoughts become something beautiful and they are filled with a fragrance of Christ' love and His joy. You find that rising from within you. It comes up from within and you don't know where it has come from. You haven't produced it yourself. It isn't because you read a book that teaches you to think a certain way. It's just a spontaneous rising from within you of the beautiful thoughts that Jesus is having at the right hand of God.

The Holy Spirit fills your life with the fragrance of Jesus and of course fills every place where you go with the fragrance of Jesus. Those in your home begin to sense sweetness in your whole life. Your business people begin to sense a fragrance about you that they can't explain. There's a sweetness comes into the relationships and the conversations you have. It's a kind of heavenly, spiritual thing that nobody can define. But the Holy Spirit brings it about in your life.

The Holy Spirit does those things. The Holy Spirit anoints you with the beauty and the strength of Jesus. Now, that's why it's so vital to receive the Holy Spirit. Paul says in Galatians, "Did you

receive the Holy Spirit by works of the law or by faith?" And of course he implies you received the Holy Spirit by faith. You receive the Holy Spirit by faith, that's it. It's not by feeling. It's not by feeling, and asking, "have I got the Holy Spirit?" You'll never feel Him. He isn't emotion. You receive Him by faith.

You simply say, "Lord Jesus, You said if I was baptized and repented in your name for the forgiveness of my sins, I would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Lord Jesus, I want to receive that gift of the Holy Spirit now, clearly today, so that from now on, I can begin to listen to Him, begin to obey Him and allow Him to grow within me." Loved ones, even if you do that in cold blood today, God will honor you. God will honor you. Do that plainly and simply this morning and Jesus will give you the gift of the Holy Spirit. And then as you listen to the Holy Spirit, He will show you more and more things in your life. And if you trust Him, He will actually do things in you.

You'll come into certain situations where you will feel, "Oh, I can't face this. I can't face this tomorrow. I don't know how to do it. I don't know what to do." If you look to the Holy Spirit and say, "Holy Spirit, will you bring about the responses that I need to produce in this situation tomorrow?" If you ask Him to do that and put your faith in Him, the Holy Spirit will miraculously bring you through that experience.

If you ask the Holy Spirit to show you what is keeping you back from a deeper closeness to God, the Holy Spirit will lead you into all truth about those things. So loved ones, do you see being a Christian is above all things, receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. There's no way in which you can be filled with the Holy Spirit or baptized with the Holy Spirit if you haven't at least received the Holy Spirit.

I would encourage your hearts if you're sitting there and thinking, "Pastor, what do you mean receive, do you mean I have to have a feeling?" No, loved ones, no. You receive Him by faith. If you would say as I used to, "The intellect rebels against it, doesn't it? How do I know I have got Him if I can't feel Him?" Faith believes that God will keep His promise. He will give you the gift of the Holy Spirit as He promised if you will repent in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins. Then God will give you the Holy Spirit.

I wonder if any of you are here this morning that have never received the Holy Spirit? You didn't really understand what it was about perhaps because of the way the Gospel was preached to you, or through the way you entered into what you felt was becoming a Christian. Maybe you were confirmed in a Lutheran church or baptized in a Baptist church and you really didn't understand what it was about. Somehow or other you feel today you're a Christian and yet you have never said quietly to Jesus, "Lord Jesus, I receive the gift of the Holy Spirit today." Remember I am not talking about the baptism of the Holy Spirit, or the fullness of the Holy Spirit. We'll deal with that in later Sundays. I am talking about just receiving the Holy Spirit as a born again Christian.

If you haven't done that, I frankly think you should come forward to the altar when we have our heads bowed and the organ is playing. I'll do what Peter and John did. Peter and John came and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit and laid their hands on them. That may be what you should do this morning.

If you've been feeling that you want to enter into these things but don't have any rising of Jesus within you, just a lot of dedication, then first receive by faith the gift of the Holy Spirit. Do that first, and then begin to listen to the Holy Spirit as He speaks to you through this coming week

and through the coming months. Allow Him to lead you on into the fullness and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. But first, settle that you're a Christian. You're one who has received the gift of the Holy Spirit. You're not just a moral person or a person who has reformed their life. You're not just a theist or a believer in God or one who is trying to be a good churchgoer.

Put yourself in the position of a New Testament Christian. One who has been baptized in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins and who has received the gift of the Holy Spirit by faith. If you need to make that move this morning and you make it, the Holy Spirit will change your life. The Holy Spirit will change your life. You'll begin to have a voice and a counselor within you that you have never known before. You'll begin to have the beginnings of a strength and a life and a power within you that will lead you through victory over even inward sin. It will lead you into the fullness and the baptism of the Spirit.

So will you decide? Decide if you should do it. If you believe you should, then I would counsel you to come up and kneel for a moment or two. I will lay my hands on you and then you should go back to your seat in faith. The laying on of hands is simply what Jesus told us to do. There is no power in me doing that. But it is what Jesus told us to do if we wanted to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Our faith is shown in doing what His words tell us. That's why we do that. There's no power in any man's hands. We're simply doing what Jesus told us to do if we wanted to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Every time we behave as simple children before Him, He gives us all the wonders of His riches.

So maybe as Marilyn plays and we bow our heads in prayer, come up and then afterwards I'll pronounce the benediction. Let us pray.

Dear Father, we thank you that you have given us an opportunity this morning to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands as you did it in New Testament times. Lord, we come now and bow before you to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' name.