

Baptism of the Holy Spirit

Acts 5:32

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Many of us have been coming to church for most of our lives and probably all of us can outline very clearly to one another what Christianity is about and yet it probably is amazing how many of us here this morning do not really live it through Monday to Saturday. Even though many of us might in some way feel part of the prayer time this morning, yet it would probably surprise even us how many of us here do not have any real prayer life of our own at home. I think many of you would say, "Yes, that's me." If I say it would surprise us how few of us ever look at the Bible in our own homes and how few of us ever read it. Then it might surprise us, too, how many of us have all the miserable troubles that everybody else has. It might surprise us how many of us have all the same struggles with the Playboy kind of approach to life that the people who don't go to church have. It might surprise us how many of us have trouble with ordinary little dishonesties in our everyday work and school experience. Yet, all of us have probably been attending church of some kind from when we were six or seven years of age and we know Christianity very, very well. If anybody asks us what religion we are, we would answer, "We are Christian. We are of the Christian religion." Many of us might even say, "I, myself am a Christian." Yet it is surprising how few of us really live the Christian spirit Monday through Saturday.

Loved ones, I think the reason is very plain and you find it in the very beginning of the book of Genesis and it's the choice that was set before man in those early days, set before him by God to mankind in his childhood as a choice between two trees. Perhaps God would set it before us a little differently today but certainly in that day it was set before him as a choice between two trees. It is Genesis 2:17, "But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat for in the day that you eat of it you shall die." That's one tree and the other tree is in verse 9 of that chapter two, "And out of the ground the Lord made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." I think that's it. I don't think there's one of us who could not outline the main tenants of the Christian Creed. We believe in God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, believe in the Holy Catholic Church, we believe in the forgiveness of sins, and believe in the Life Everlasting. Most of us could outline in some degree those things. Most of us could talk half sensibly about prayer. Most of us have great knowledge, we're strong in knowledge, and we're strong on knowledge of good and evil, and we're big on what is right for a person to do and what is wrong for a person to do but as far as the tree of life is concerned, we know very little about it.

In other words, we are Christian because Christian ideas are up here filling our heads and we're Christian because Christian ideas fill our understandings but Christian spirit does not fill our hearts.

When we get out of here at noon or shortly after we find that inside we are just the same as everybody else who doesn't go to church. There is nothing different inside that comes up from inside us to direct us differently. We just work the same way everybody else works, we think the same way, we act the same way, we feel the same way. It is really because we're just Christians in knowledge. We have taken a lot of knowledge of good and evil into us over the years that we've attended church and Sunday school but we've never, ever contacted the spirit of life that comes from God. You may say, "Oh, well I am born again and I know my sin is forgiven. I've been through that thing that

you're talking about."

Loved ones, it is very important for us to see that the great emphasis on forgiveness of sins in our day covers the Old Testament Gospel. The Old Testament people knew how to have their sins forgiven, they knew that God was ready to forgive them their sins.

That is not the New Testament Gospel. The New Testament Gospel is something far more alive and alert and actual and dynamic than just knowing that your sins are forgiven. Even David and the old people of the Old Testament days knew that their sins were forgiven, they knew that God had mercy upon them. He said, "Blessed is the man whose sins are not imputed to him." Blessed is the man whose sin is covered, they knew that. If you say to me, "Yeah, because of the blood of bulls and cows and beasts." No, they knew it because it wasn't only that which God required. God said to them, "I don't only want sacrifice. I want obedience." So they would do everything in their power to obey God. They knew something beyond the blood of beasts and the blood of bulls but they knew little or nothing except for a few outstanding men among them. They knew little or nothing of the tree of life, and the tree of life is what the New Testament Gospel is about.

I'll show you that if you will look at Mark chapter 1. This chapter happens to mention both Gospels, the Old Testament Gospel and the New Testament Gospel. The Old Testament Gospel is in Mark 1:4, "John the Baptizer appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." That was John. He was an Old Testament man. He was an Old Testament evangelist and the Gospel he preached was an Old Testament Gospel. He preached of baptism, of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Now that's what many of us have heard and many of us have entered into in these days and to that extent we are Old Testament Gospel people. You see the New Testament Gospel in verse 8. Mark 1:8, "I have baptized you with water," but John says, "He (Jesus) will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." The New Testament Gospel is concerned with baptism of the Holy Spirit. That's what it is. Eating of the tree of life is being baptized with the Holy Spirit. If you say to me, "But I had some experience with the Holy Spirit when I was born of God; I sensed a different spirit coming into me." Yes, but you know fine well what you have done with that Spirit over the years. You have regarded that Spirit as a kind of consultant or an advisor and you would listen to that Spirit's advice and then you would decide whether you wanted to do what that Spirit told you or not. That Spirit would speak and then the attitudes and the habits of the society around you would speak, and that Spirit would speak, and your friends would speak, and that Spirit would speak, and then other books that you read would speak, and newspapers that you read would speak, and gradually you began to separate yourself more and more from that Spirit.

You still regard yourself as born of God because that Spirit from time to time is able by the tremendous struggle to break out and let you know once in a while what God wants you to do. In those little crisis moments maybe you make the right decision but on the whole your life is not governed by that Spirit, it is governed by the attitudes of the people around you, by the people that you live with and work with, by the books that you read, by the newspapers you absorb, by the television that we watch. Loved ones, we are really Old Testament people who are not eating of the tree of life and that's why your life Monday through Saturday is no different from everybody else's. If you say to me, "Well, I've heard of this Baptism of the Holy Spirit and I've heard of speaking in tongues and gifts of healing and all that stuff. All right, but that's not very much what I need. I need something that will keep me in God's presence Monday through Saturday in my thinking, in the way I tackle my business problems, in the way I tackle the commercial decisions I have to make, in the way I tackle things at home and at school. I need something that will keep me in line with the Spirit that I feel at times in service on Sunday mornings."

Loved ones, that's what the baptism of the Holy Spirit is about. That's what it's about. I am not a Baptist. I was a Methodist before we started Campus Church so I am not preaching water baptism but it is interesting that the Greek word for baptism in the New Testament does mean immerse. Not necessarily immerse in water but immerse and be immersed. That's the heart of what the baptism of the Holy Spirit is about. It is being totally immersed in the Holy Spirit, it is being totally immersed in Him -- not having part of yourself in Him and part out but being totally immersed in Him, completely covered by Him, completely surrounded by Him, completely controlled by Him. That's what it means.

When you talk about a person being baptized with the Holy Spirit you are talking about a person who is not just ready to have the Holy Spirit within them as a kind of advisor or consultant but as a person who absolutely commands everything in that dear one's life.

Brothers and sisters, that's what real faith in God is. You and I know it fine well. It's not real faith to trust Him up to the point where you disagree with Him. It's not. It's not real faith to trust Him just as far as you understand. We may say to God "Now wait a minute, I can see how you can pull me out if I go to this brink of financial disaster but I can't see how you can pull me out if I go to that brink of financial disaster so I'll just go to point A. I can't make it to point B." But don't you see that in a way it's all bluff? If you pull back whenever you want to from the Spirit of God within you, then He isn't really your God at all. He isn't really your God. I can speak to you very realistically as a schoolteacher. If you have 30 kids in a classroom and you have absolute authority over every one but the little guy in the back who just can do whatever he wants when he wants and you just can't do anything with him. You may be teacher of 29 of them but you're not teacher of that class. In other words, if you're not teacher of all, you're really not teacher at all because he can pull the rug from under you at any time.

It's the same with our God. If you pull back and retain the right to pull back from what He tells you to do whenever you want, then your designation of Him as your God is purely self-serving and theoretical. In fact, He is God only as long as you let Him be God, only as long as you choose to obey Him. His Spirit runs your life only as long as you agree with that Spirit. Loved ones, therefore you're not really experiencing the power of God in your life at all. If you say to me, "Now brother, from time to time I have." Yes, God out of His graciousness manifests His life in you from time to time to try and draw you to Himself just as He has allowed things like earthquakes to develop in the earth's surface to reveal to us that things are not right and they are not as they were planned at the beginning. So God manifests within us, even the most pagan among us, some of His Spirit and some of His own attitudes and some of His own desires. Now loved ones, that is purely a sovereign act in grace towards you. If He is God only as long as you allow Him to be God, then He isn't God and if you obey His Spirit only when you choose to obey His Spirit, then you are not baptized with the Holy Spirit and that's why you do not have an experience of life Monday through Saturday.

God will only give His life to people who will let Him be God completely every moment of their days. That's really what the baptism of the Holy Spirit is about. There's a verse that I could show you in Acts 5:32 and it takes all the mystery out of the truth about the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It is just a very plain verse, "We are witnesses to these things and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him." That's it.

Tongues might come and they might not come. It doesn't matter if you never speak in tongues. You

might never do a work of healing, you might never see a miracle but God will give the Holy Spirit to those who obey Him. He will give the Holy Spirit to any of us here who stop this part time service to God. You know you see it. It's just so plain and logical. If you obey God only as long as you agree with Him then you're not obeying God. You are just obeying yourself and you're passing it off. You are kind of passing a soft compliment to Him. "I really obeyed You, God." He knows you really obeyed your own will.

Do you remember CS Lewis's comment that reminds me of the dogs that we have owned through the years? He said he had an old dog in Ireland and he never actually obeyed you, he just sometimes agreed with you and it reminds me of ours, you know, after they've been to obedience school, "Come on, come on," and he wouldn't bother, you know, but he might choose to get up himself after his own volition after about 5 minutes and of course you prided yourself that it was because you commanded him. It wasn't, he just agreed with you for that moment. That's what it is. It is the difference between a life that agrees sometimes with God and a life that obeys God and if your life simply agrees with God whenever it is convenient for you to agree with Him, then He isn't your God. He isn't your God. You can see that. I know you can because it's just logical intellect if you obey God only when you agree with God, then He isn't God. God, by definition, is one who commands. He is one, by definition, who is absolute authority whether you understand what He's commanding you or not.

Brothers and sisters, I think many of us have missed the glory and the delight and the liberty of the baptism of the Holy Spirit simply because of that fact: that we still think we're obeying God when actually we're just agreeing with Him. It's just convenient for us at times. We aren't immersed in the Holy Spirit, we have the Holy Spirit, we have Him, we've got Him, He can't do anything that we won't let Him do. We have the Holy Spirit but the Holy Spirit doesn't have us. He doesn't have us. Don't you see that's why we have our agonies in business situations and in school situations and in home situations and a thousand other situations that you get worried about and get anxious about? You have them because you're still in charge; you're still in charge of your life. It's still your life. You have no resource besides yourself. It's still up to you absolutely, that's why we go forward in such fear and trembling because most of us aren't aware of how finite our knowledge is and our understanding is and how short sighted we are and how unbalanced we are in our analysis of things. No wonder we're worried, no wonder we're anxious. Most of us would be reluctant to trust ourselves with a brown paper bag but here we are, we have to trust our whole lives to ourselves. No wonder we get worried, and anxious, and fearful.

Loved ones, that wasn't the plan at all. You can't know what that other guy is going to do across the table. You can't. There is no way. You can't know what is going to happen to those wretched interest rates. You can't know what will happen to the retirement fund 20 years down the road. You can't know what will happen to social security 30 years down the road. You can't know what this other person will do but there is a Maker who put you here, who knows it absolutely and will command you and direct you in the light of what He has planned for your life -- which is the best thing for your life because He knows you better than you know yourself. That's why He wants to be your God. Being immersed in the Holy Spirit is being covered over with the Holy Spirit completely so that when He prompts you to do something, you do it.

If you say to me, "Can I know that today?" You certainly can know that Jesus has baptized you with the Holy Spirit this morning, you certainly can. You can come to a place of honesty with God today. You know you can. Why should I persuade you? You know you can. You know you can come to a place of honesty today with God and say, "God I am going to obey You whatever. Whatever, whether I agree with You or not, whether it prospers me or whether it destroys me, I am going to obey You from this day

forward." You know you can say that. Every one of us -- we should not bluff each other -- every one of us knows fine well you can take that position this morning if you so choose. Moreover, I'd push you a little. You know the areas already where you have not been doing that. You know! You can line them right up. You know the areas that begin to make you tremble when you think of making that kind of commitment. Those are the areas that God is saying prevents you, not only being baptized in the Holy Spirit, but prevents that life beginning to surge within you that will keep you dynamically close to Him Monday through Saturday and will maintain the Spirit of His presence in your heart every moment.

That's it. It is not a mystery at all. It is no great mystery. Those dear guys in the first century, they didn't have half our education, they didn't have half the attendance at church that we have had, but when they came forward for baptism Paul explained to them, "Now listen, do you know that you're being baptized into Christ's death. You are being baptized into His death so that as He was raised from the dead by the power of the Father, you too might be raised and walk in absolute newness of life because we all know our old self was crucified with Christ so that the body of sin might be destroyed and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. So when you come and are baptized, that's the end of that old life of self-direction, of self-judging, of self-decision making and this is a new life where you're no longer God. You bury that god and the real God becomes the God of your life. So as you go under this water into this river and the water covers over you and cuts you off from all kinds of communication with the outside world, now you're totally dependent on the power and the life that is under the water, you are totally dependent on the power and the life that is in the Holy Spirit that is immersing you."

That's what it is, loved ones. I don't know, some of you know Pascal, a French scientist. He put it all in terms of a great wager. Of course he puts it so wisely in his book, "Pensees", which means "thoughts". He puts it so wisely that you can see plainly there is no choice. There is no difficulty about a wager. The wager is bound to end up one way and, I put it to you, which is safest? Safest isn't even a word.

Which is sane, for you to be god of your life or for the God of the whole universe to be God of your life? Which is sane and which is insane? Which is intelligent and which is unintelligent? But above everything else, which is God's will, which is the Creator's will for your life?

Loved ones, you can make the choice this morning. You can, you know. I would ask you, if you have up until now lacked the sense of God's Spirit within you Monday through Saturday, if you are tired of coming on Sunday for a vital injection to try to keep you going until at least Tuesday, if you know that you don't have great delight in God in your daily devotions--it's kind of a bore, it's kind of a weight and responsibility--you don't often read the Bible, you are overwhelmed by all the same kinds of strong feelings of lust and envy and hate that everybody else has. In fact, you wonder in what way you are a Christian, if you are in that situation where you have had some experience of the forgiveness of your sins but you have little experience of life from God.

If your Christianity is a knowledge thing, a knowledge of this is right and this is wrong, this is the right thing to believe, this is the wrong thing to believe, this is where the Methodists stand, this is where the Pentecostals stand, this is what somebody believes about war, this is what somebody believes about abortion. If your Christianity has been just the sum total of your knowledge and the facts that you've absorbed and if you have no experience of this life that flows like a river and that begins to bring into you the joy and the light of the One who said, "Look at the lilies of the field. They toil not, neither do they reap and yet Solomon in all his glory was not

arrayed like one of these. Look at the birds of the field, birds of the air. They don't sow or reap or gather into barns and yet your Heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of much more value than the sparrows?"

If you want the Spirit of that Son, of that Lord Jesus Christ within you, all through the week and throughout your life, then let God be God of your life. Be baptized in His Holy Spirit this morning. Immerse yourself in Him and say, "Lord God, I will obey You from this time forward. I will not debate with You or discuss. I will obey You in every area of my life, whatever it costs." That's what it is to be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

The only way I know to do it is to make a definite declaration to God that you've done it and you do that in faith. You can certainly do it there where you're sitting or the altar is open during the closing hymn. You can come up and if you want me to pray with you or someone else, you can remain there after the benediction but if you just want to make your commitment to God yourself in a definite way then just go up and kneel and make a commitment and then come back down while the hymn is being sung. I would encourage you, especially those of you who see the logic of it all, especially those who see it plainly that if God is not Lord of all then He is not Lord at all and so you're experiencing nothing of real religion, nothing of real religion. Loved ones, I encourage you if you see that plainly. I encourage you to take steps today to make the change and to enter into a life that is simple, simple, simple compared with the complicated one you're living now. It is simple because when God's Spirit speaks within you, you obey and then you begin to see your life moving out and being freed and delivered from yourself and your narrowness. I'd encourage you to do it. Let us pray.

Dear Father, I pray that You will, as You always do, deal powerfully and mightily with us and Lord I pray especially for the ones to whom You have spoken this morning, that they will make definite steps towards Your altar this morning and will make a new start in their life. A complete change from a life of half obedience and a life of knowledge, into a life of total obedience and of life that is eternal. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.