

Be Filled with the Spirit

- Read John 14: 1-6 - *“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. 2 In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. 4 And you know the way to where I am going.” 5 Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” 6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*
- There was a story in the news this past week about the Bible on a “Missing Man” display at an Air Force base in Wyoming being replaced by a generic “book of faith.”
 - The display which included the Bible was branded by the Military Religious Freedom Foundation as a “blatant display of fundamentalist Christian supremacy, domination and exceptionalism.”
 - I won’t get involved in the politics of this situation, and whether it is appropriate for the military to promote any religion, or one religion over the other. Instead, I want to address the idea of “Christian supremacy.”
 - If we read Jesus’ words honestly and, in faith, accept what He is saying – that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and that no one comes to the Father but through Him – then we must believe that Christianity indeed IS the supreme religion.
 - If we take Jesus at His word, every other religion is false. Every other religion is a lie. If you can’t say “Amen” to this statement by Jesus, then you can’t claim to be a devoted follower of Christ.
 - Either Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and the only way to come to the Father, or He was deluded, or He was an evil liar. You cannot claim to be a devoted follower of Jesus while denying what he said about Himself.
 - Every person who is confronted with an accurate portrayal of Jesus (the one described in the Bible) must make a decision about His claim of supremacy.
- With this as a backdrop, I want to talk about three main ways that Christianity is distinct and superior to all other religions.
- I will use Jesus’ statement above as a categorical tool (a memory device) with which to discuss these distinctives. They are (in reversed order):
 - The Life - The Man the Life of Christ, the singular things He accomplished, and the example he set;
 - The Truth - The Message, the things He taught;
 - The Way - The Means by which His disciples are empowered and equipped to live the Christian life and to complete our assigned mission to disciple the nations.
- I’ll briefly touch on the first two (the Man and the Message), but I want to spend the bulk of my time on the third, the Means.

- While discussing this, if you'll permit, I'd like to share my personal testimony of how I came to the faith.

1. The Man/the Life –

- No other teacher, prophet, guru, television personality, political figure, sports hero, military general, or philosophical genius can lay claim to the things about Jesus Christ that were and are unique. Think about this:
 - Hundreds and even thousands of years before He was born, His coming was predicted and recorded by God's prophets. Dozens of details about major events and accomplishments in His life were predicted in astonishing detail.
 - He was born of a virgin.
 - He performed miracles which included healings, deliverance of individuals from tormenting demons, and supernatural acts in which he defied laws of science and meteorology.
 - In spite of a terribly cruel and torturous death, He rose from the dead and appeared to over 500 of His most devoted followers.
 - Many of these people would end up being tortured themselves, but they would not deny the fact that they witnessed His resurrection. People will die for what they think is the truth even though it may be false, but no one will die for something they KNOW to be a lie.
 - In full sight of His disciples, He ascended to heaven.
 - Millions of His followers have had their lives wonderfully altered because of their belief in Him. There are millions of institutions, buildings, organizations, monuments, books, and works of art all around the world that testify to His life.
- And I could go on about the life of Jesus Christ, a life like no other.
- The Apostle Peter's words recorded in Acts 4:12 provides a fitting summary: *And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*

2. The Message/Truth –

- Consistently, the wisdom of the things Jesus taught is verified by the positive results seen in those who actually follow His teachings.
- Every other religion or life philosophy is based in either self-improvement as a way to please their god or (if they don't actively believe in a god) self-worship. Men and women are trying to do things to appease and please their gods or they are trying to please and appease themselves.
- The recent rash of high-profile suicides is an indication that even people who seemingly "have it all" really have found nothing of any enduring value, or at least it didn't help them during their time of crisis.

- Christianity is different. God became a man, showed us how to live, then He died in our place. Christianity is God (through Jesus Christ) reaching down to humans and humbling Himself to remove the enmity or division between us and Him.
- Through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ we are saved by grace. It's a free gift from the God who created us. We don't earn it.
- God has revealed his will in Scripture, which is a treasure preserved through the ages for those who believe. The way to a successful and fulfilling life is made clear in the pages of the Bible. What a gift!
- Again, the Apostle Peter provides a summary in 2 Peter 1:3-4: *His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.*

3. The Way/the Means

- Jesus promised His disciples that, when He went away, He would not leave them as orphans (John 14:18). He said *"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you"* (John 14:16-17).
- After His resurrection and just prior to His ascension, Jesus told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem because, in just a few days, they would be *"baptized with the Holy Spirit"* who would give them power to witness *"in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth"* (Acts 1:5, 8)
- In other places Jesus said this Helper, the Holy Spirit, would teach them all things and remind them of all He had said to them (John 14:26). He would guide them into all truth, He would declare to them things that were to come, he would not speak on His own authority but, instead, He would glorify Jesus but taking the things that are His and declare them to His followers (John 16:12-15). The Spirit would convict the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment (John 16:8-11).
- In fact, Jesus said it was better that He went away so the Holy Spirit could come and dwell in His people (John 16:7).
- Indeed, when the Holy Spirit fell on the followers of Jesus on the day of Pentecost, they were transformed. This small band of formerly confused, timid, and doubtful followers would go on to transform their world, and most of them would suffer greatly and be martyred for their testimony. They refused to deny the fact that they had seen the resurrected Christ. The Holy Spirit enabled them to witness and do this work against insurmountable odds.
- This promise of the indwelling spirit was not just for disciples in the first century. When Peter stood on the Day of Pentecost and preached his first sermon under the power of the Holy Spirit, the multitudes who heard him were *"cut to the heart."* They asked what they should do. Peter replied *"Repent and be baptized"*

every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself” (Acts 2:38-39).

- The book of Acts tells the story of how various people groups heard the teaching of the disciples and how they received the gift of the Holy Spirit. The unfolding revelation was that salvation is not for the Jews in Jerusalem only, but it was also for those in Judea, in Samaria (half breeds), and even for the Gentiles who were “far off.” In each case, the people who received the Spirit “spoke in tongues and glorified God.” The reason for this was so the apostles could be assured by God that people besides orthodox Jews were also being offered membership in the kingdom. This was a radical, paradigm-shifting adjustment in their theological understanding of the ways of God. Speaking in a language one had never learned was a miraculous sign that the conversion was real and approved by God.
- The gift of the Holy Spirit is not just for some believers; it’s for everyone whom God calls to Himself. In fact, the Apostle Paul states emphatically in Romans 8:9 that “anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him.”
- Paul also indicates that the gift of the Holy Spirit is a “guarantee,” or a “down payment” of our inheritance that is waiting for us in Heaven. In Ephesians 1:13-14 Paul says *“In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.”* The gift of the Holy Spirit is a bit of heaven on earth. We can get a taste of what Heaven is like when we are filled with the Spirit.

To summarize the three things that distinguishes Christianity from every other religion or philosophy...the Life, the Truth, and the Way:

- Jesus Christ is unique in history. His life, the things He taught and accomplished, and His incarnation, resurrection, and ascension put Him in a class that is far and above and every human who has ever lived. **He is the Life.**
- The truths of Christianity are the truest truths in the world. They are far superior and even run counter to the empty philosophies of this world. Salvation is not a matter of working hard to be good enough for heaven. Salvation is a gift we receive because of faith in Jesus Christ. **He is the Truth.**
- By faith in Christ and by receiving the truths he taught, we receive the gift of His Spirit who empowers us and reminds us of the things He taught. The Holy Spirit changes us from the inside out. **He is the Way.**

I’d like to share my testimony in the context of these three things.

- Raised in a denominational Christian home. Methodist. Mom taught Sunday School. Dad to church came if he liked the preacher. I attended Bible School each summer.
- I prayed if I wanted something or if I was afraid of something like the weather or of being in trouble.

- I was schooled in the basics of Christianity. I knew about Jesus. I was taught His truths. But I was just a nominal believer. It was kinda like “Jesus rose from the dead. Richard Nixon is president. Everybody has a Volkswagen.” All true things, but they didn’t really have that much of an impact on my life.
- I had a fairly refined conscience, based mostly in fear of being punished. As I grew older and became a teenager, my conscience became less an issue as I explored swearing, alcohol, and relationships with girls. I was ornery but not “bad.” I honored my parents and teachers, but I was sneaky and liked to push the envelope when it came to my behavior on weekends, Boy Scout camp outs, and the like.
- Several times, I experienced altar calls (watching Billy Graham on TV, going to a Spurlows concert in the fall of 1971) and I hated the way they made me feel guilty. Even so, at the Spurlows concert my friends pressured me to go forward and repeat the Sinner’s prayer. The ministry team gave us a little Gospel of John. I tried to read it but it was hard for me to understand.
- In April, 1972 (I was 15 years old) a Lay Witness team came to the Millersport United Methodist Church for a weekend event. Lay Witness Mission weekends grew out of an amazing revival that took place on the Asbury College Campus in Wilmore, Kentucky in February, 1970. At a routine chapel service the morning of February 3, a spirit of repentance, prayer, worship, and testimonies fell on the students in the assembly hall, and it continued for 24 hours a day for just over a week. It was a spontaneous outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Whenever students who had been a part of the event went to other campuses to share what had happened to them, similar revivals would break out at those campuses. Lay Witness Missions were organized to provide even more opportunities to spread the revival to any church who would invite a team in for the weekend.
- I heard about the Mission (although I had no idea about it’s roots or history), but I decided I would avoid any meetings where I suspected an altar call would be given. I went to one of the Saturday morning coffee hour groups, and a couple young college students talked about their new, deeper relationships with God. They invited us to talk about our own spiritual lives. I don’t think I said much. One of the young men mentioned there would be an altar call at the service that evening. I decided right then and there I wasn’t going.
- Dad was working on a building project at home, so I told my friends I needed to stay home to help him, which I did. All through the evening I felt like I was probably missing out on something special, but what could I do? Dad needed my help. I remember writing the date on the inside wall of the storage cabinet we were working on. That date is still there: April 22, 1972. I think I had a sense that it would be a date to remember. Strange!
- By the time I went to bed, my conscience was nagging at me because I felt like I had purposely stiff-armed at important opportunity to get right with God. He was definitely putting his finger on me. So, I knelt beside my bed and quietly surrendered my life. I recall praying “God, I don’t know what my friends are experiencing right now. But I don’t want to be left behind. I’m dedicating my life to you right now. I’m sorry for the

things I've done wrong. Please forgive me." No lightning bolts, no warm feelings. Just a peace that I had done the right thing.

- The next morning, April 23, 1972, I went to the early church service. When I got there it was obvious many of my friends had had fairly emotional experiences the night before. The girls were crying and hugging each other. A couple of my friends said, "You missed it Thogmartin." During the church service one of the college students talked about the importance of a life dedicated to God, and how critical it was to make a public confession. At the end of the service there was an altar call. I went up, but I stood by myself because the other teenagers who went to the front were together in a big tear-filled group hug. I felt like a bit of an outsider, but I was glad I made a public confession of my new commitment to Christ.
- I decided to go to the Sunday evening testimony meeting. The Lay Witness team would have left by then and only people I knew would be there talking about their experiences that weekend. I didn't really know what to expect. I just wanted to hear more about what I had missed.
- Sure enough, one after another, adults and young people, shared their stories of how God had touched their hearts. It was great to listen to the testimonies from some of my closest friends. I was surprised to hear, from some people who I considered to be "hoods," about what God had revealed to them and of the commitments they were making to a new Christian walk. One young man named Burt Cole, who we all knew was heavily into alcohol and even drug use, started to give his emotional testimony...
- As I was listening, tears began to well up inside of me. Then WOOSH! All heaven broke loose! Let me emphasize, I came to this meeting with no expectations of any kind of spiritual experience. I had heard of "revivals" before, but I didn't know anything about the Holy Spirit. Even so, the Holy Spirit fell on me in a way that I honestly can't put into words. It was glorious. My heart was bursting with an overpowering sense that I was loved, loved, loved by God. It was pure bliss. I was in such a glorious daze that I couldn't talk. Everyone in the room knew that something was happening to me and I didn't care. I went up front and tried to explain but I was in a puddle of tears and joy and peace and love. I don't recall how long all this lasted. I didn't care.
- When the even meeting was over the teenagers migrated over to the Whetstone's house. I don't recall how I got there. Maybe I floated. People would walk up to me and hug me and laugh and cry. How do you describe heaven on earth? Words fail me even now, but I will never, ever forget the bliss of that evening. God apprehended me forever. I had given Him my life and He gave me His Spirit in overabundance.
- I think I walked home. I cried tears of joy as I fell asleep. I woke up the next morning in the same cloud of bliss, but it was not as overwhelming...meaning that I knew where I was and I could function somewhat. Mom was awake before anyone else, and I remember talking to her in the living room and trying to explain what was happening to me. She listened with such a sweet, motherly heart then she said something I'll never forget. She said "This is wonderful, Mark. Just don't let it slip away in a few weeks when the excitement wears off. Make sure this is a commitment you have made for the rest of

your life.” I think, 6 months later she was probably thinking “I wish Mark would let this slip away just a bit.”

- Over the next 2 or 3 days the schedule of classes at the high school was interrupted because students were testifying about the revival that happened over the weekend. It was truly a very special time, and something only God could orchestrate.
- During the next months things did return to normal in Millersport. Steve Bush told me he had been praying for me ever since his conversion at camp. We became even a closer friend as, together, we pursued the things of God, even to the point of being branded a bit too “radical” for the youth group.
- Over the next several years we found groups of like-minded believers who, themselves, had been apprehended by God and filled with the Spirit. Those days were so exciting! We couldn’t seem to get enough of God, attending church and prayer meetings, Bible studies, youth groups, and conferences.

* Your experience with the Holy Spirit is probably different than mine. As Pastor Steve said a few weeks ago, God’s way of apprehending His children is totally individualized and unique to each life. He may fill one person with His Spirit gradually as that believer matures, and He may choose to pour it on at the beginning as He did for me. But I can say with confidence...He wants each and every believer to be full of the Spirit. He commands it.

- Ephesians 5: 15-21:

15 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, 20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

- Walk wisely, use your time in wholesome ways, and instead of indulging in foolishness, seek to know God’s will by spending time in His word.
- Paul contrasts getting drunk with being filled by the spirit. Both experiences will give you a high, but one way is called debauchery (which means excessive indulgence in sensual pleasures). Trust me, being filled with the Spirit is something we should crave for...more than any earthly pleasure.
- Paul’s prescription for being filled with the spirit includes:
 - Addressing yourself and one another with words that are based in scriptural truths – songs, hymns, and spiritual songs.
 - Singing and making melody to the Lord in your heart with these words
 - Giving thanks always for everything
 - Submitting yourselves to one another, which means having a humble attitude.
- If we walk with this kind of lifestyle, we are setting ourselves up to be ready to be filled with the Spirit in God’s timing. That’s the thing...**even though we are**

commanded to be filled with the Spirit, we can't fill ourselves. It's God's doing. Be we can be willing and ready!! Don't resist what He may be doing in you!

- In closing, listen to Paul's as he describes the way he prays for all believers in Ephesians 3:14-21:

***14** For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, **15** from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, **16** that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, **17** so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, **18** may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, **19** and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

***20** Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, **21** to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

Other resources:

- Quote by A.W. Tozer: *“Before we can be filled with the Spirit, the desire to be filled must be all-consuming. It must be for the time the biggest thing in the life, so acute, so intrusive as to crowd out everything else. The degree of fullness in any life accords perfectly with the intensity of true desire. We have as much of God as we actually want.”*
- Sermon by John Piper titled “Be Filled with the Spirit”
<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/be-filled-with-the-spirit>
- Video documentary of the Asbury Revival of 1970.
<https://youtu.be/LBrmPw9f1ok>