

Chapel Message
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
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MacArthur Boulevard Baptist Church, Irving, Texas

(This copy has been prepared from a tape recording of the chapel service and has not been edited by Reverend Dunn. Therefore, he is not responsible for any errors that may occur.)

They tell me that it is impolite to ask personal questions. I'm going to be impolite for a few minutes, because I want to ask you a very personal question. And the question is simply this, "Is the Holy Spirit filling you right now?" Now the question isn't, "Is the Holy Spirit indwelling you right now," because if you are saved, then that is true. Nor is the question; "Do you believe in the filling of the Holy Spirit?" Nor is the question, "Have you ever been filled with the Holy Spirit?" The question is, "Right now, at this moment, is the Spirit of God filling you?" Now there are three possible answers to that question: "Yes," "No," "I don't know."

But I want you to know this morning that the filling of the Holy Spirit is available and, more than that, it is the obligation of every child of God. And I realize that this is an issue around which gathers a lot of misunderstanding today. One of our young men this past summer went to serve as youth director in a West Texas church and this pastor said, "Now there's only one thing I want to caution you about...don't say anything about the spirit-filled life, because we've had so much problem in our area with tongues."

Are we so foolish as to believe that you can cure error by covering up the truth? I'm convinced the reason that so many people are having trouble with extremes concerning the Holy Spirit is because we have failed to preach and to teach the truth. And all of this extremism that we're having today is, in my opinion, nothing more than the hunger pangs of a spiritually starved people. They've asked for the fish of spiritual reality, and we've given them the stones of promotion and organization. I think pastors are discovering that no longer are people going to be stirred and excited by another attendance goal.

Man is a spiritual being and he must have supernatural experiences. That is a very part of his nature. And man is going to have a supernatural experience. If he cannot find it inside the church, he will find it outside the church. If he cannot have an experience with the Holy Spirit, he will have one with an unholy spirit. And I'm talking to more and more pastors today who stand bewildered before a people they can no longer move nor bless. The solution and the greatest need is for men and women to be filled with the Spirit of God. And it's my prayer that every Christian will claim that for him right now, because you can know Jesus is real in your life; you can know the peace that passes all understanding and the joy unspeakable and full of glory. Available to you right now is a life in which even the valleys are higher ground. Maybe you have personal weaknesses that have haunted and humiliated you even before you were saved. They can be overcome today as the Spirit of God moves into your life in new force and new power.

What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit? Paul says in Ephesians 5:18, "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit." Now I want to share with you three simple things concerning the filling of the Spirit from that verse of scripture. First of all, the filling of the Holy Spirit is a command of God. That's an imperative verb. "Be filled with the

Spirit." It is not a suggestion from God, it is not God simply expressing a desire, but it is God uttering a command. Did you realize that if you're not filled with the Holy Spirit, you are living in disobedience to God? Has it ever occurred to you that not to be filled with the Holy Spirit is a sin against God? The filling of the Spirit is not a luxury item in the Christian life. It is not optional equipment. God commands us to be filled with the Spirit.

You know I've discovered in my own life a basic precept essential to spiritual success. And that precept is this: My total inability to do anything for myself in the spiritual realm. And if you happen to forget everything else I say today, I wish you would remember this one fact, because until you come to the place where you're willing to acknowledge this, God cannot use you to the fullest. My total inability to do anything for myself in the spiritual realm. One of my favorite characters is Elijah; one of the greatest exhortations ever made was made by that prophet on Mt. Carmel. You read that sometime. If you ever come that close to preaching, you'll be doing fine. But the amazing thing is after Elijah delivered that tremendous message was: "They answered him not a word." Brother, I've preached there before. I've pastored that congregation many a time. "They answered him not a word." But the Bible says, "When the fire fell, they fell on their faces and said, 'The Lord, He is God. The Lord, He is God.'" And when the fire of God falls in the lives of men and women, the people will fall on their faces acknowledging that the Lord, He is God, and beside Him there is none else.

You cannot do what God has called you to do unless the Spirit of God is filling you. Jesus said, speaking of the fullness of the Holy Spirit, "If you come to me and drink, out of your innermost being shall flow rivers of living water." You see, it's so simple; Jesus says, "You supply the riverbed, I'll supply the river." I don't know of anybody that is blessed by a riverbed. And the tragedy is that so many of us today are nothing more than dried-up, crusty riverbeds that can quench no one's thirst. Jesus says, "You make yourself available; you're nothing but a riverbed, you come to me and drink and appropriate what I am and out of your innermost being shall flow rivers of living water."

A young preacher came to me some time ago and said, "In your consideration, in your opinion, what is your primary obligation as the pastor of this church?" And I didn't have to think about that. I said, "My primary responsibility as pastor of this church is to make certain that Ron Dunn is filled with the Holy Spirit." My primary responsibility is not to be an administrator, not to be a promoter, not to be a planner, not to visit in hospitals, not to bury and marry, my primary responsibility is not even to the people over whom I shepherd. My primary responsibility is to be filled with the Spirit, to have the rivers of living water flowing out of me and the people will be blessed by the overflow from my life.

Elisha was a man that we could well pattern ourselves after. He was known as Elisha, then he was known as Elisha, the man of God, and then he was simply known as the man of God. If you were around that neck of the woods, and spoke the words, "Man of God," they all knew who you were talking about. Your primary responsibility is first of all to be a man or a woman of God. And when the Spirit of God is filling you, those rivers of living water will pour forth from your being, from your life, and the people in that way will be blessed and ministered to. It will be Jesus himself ministering to the people through your availability.

And the interesting thing about that passage in John, chapter 7, is that you start out thirsty and then you end up a fountain. Has that ever occurred to you? "If ANY man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink." And the fellow who starts out thirsty, will end up quenching the thirst of others. It is a command of God, because you cannot do what God has called you to do without it.

But not only is it a command of God, it is a command to be controlled by God. I like the way the New English Bible translates that verse, because it is a passive verb. "Let the Holy Spirit fill you." Now I must confess to you that for a great many years I thought that God was reluctant to fill me with his Spirit. I read every book I could get my hands on. I more than anything else wanted to be all that God wanted me to be. I wanted to be useable, and I had the idea that somehow when I reached a certain spiritual plateau as a reward of my spiritual growth, God would grant me to be filled with the Spirit. So I looked upon God as reluctant and hesitating and I had to somehow beg my way into the fullness of the Spirit. But the Bible teaches the exact opposite of that. He said, "Let the Holy Spirit fill you." He wants to fill you. The only thing he's waiting for is your consent, your submission.

And to be filled with the Spirit is, as one man has translated that verse, "Let the Holy Spirit possess you completely." It simply means that he comes in and no longer is he simply the owner of your life, but he is the operator of your life. We pulled into a filling station the other day and I noticed over the door these words, "So-and-so, Owner and Operator." Now that's what Jesus Christ wants to be. And for all of us he's the owner this morning, but for many of us he's not the operator. Life under new management. A new person has taken over and expresses himself through our human personality. To be filled with the Spirit simply means to let the Spirit of God control every area of my life.

Now that causes me to pause for just a moment because some of us just want the "thrill of the fill." Some of us just want an ecstatic experience. You want to be filled with the Spirit today. You mean to tell me that you want someone who will not tolerate any selfishness controlling you. Do you mean to tell me today that you want someone who will never allow you to think of yourself first controlling you. Do you mean to say that you want someone controlling you today who will not tolerate even the slightest sin. Do you mean to say that you want to be controlled today by someone who is going to demand absolute obedience, unquestioning obedience to every command. That's exactly what it is.

I've found in my own life that the Holy Spirit cannot really fill me and control me until two things happen in my life. Number one, until I do what Jesus said to do in Luke, chapter 9, "deny myself." Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him take up his cross and deny himself." Williams translates that, "Let him say no to self." Now that's tremendous, for you see my self is always talking to me...always making suggestions. When a lady runs out in front of me at a four-way stop, you know what my self says? My self says, "You lay down on your horn; don't let her get away with that." When I do something and somebody else gets the credit for it, you know what self whispers to me. "Now listen, you've got to watch out for yourself. You let everybody know who did that. You take the credit for it." My self is always talking to me...always making suggestions...always telling me that I'm wonderful, that I'm great, that I'm right, that everybody else is wrong and I need to look out for myself. Jesus said, "If you are going to follow me, you say 'No' to self, you just tell self to be quiet. You refuse to listen to self. That's what it means to deny yourself. F. B. Myer, the great Baptist preacher of years ago put it this way, "You must

dethrone self. S. D. Gordon was a great preacher. He wrote the "Quiet Talk" series, and as he was preaching along occasionally he would pause and lean down on the pulpit and put his hand to his mouth and whisper, "Are you listening? In every heart there is a throne and a cross. If you're on the throne, Jesus is still on the cross." What it means for me to dethrone myself is to get off the throne of my life and to take my place on that cross and to enthrone Jesus as Lord in my life.

And that's the other thing...not only must there be a dethroning of self but there must be an enthroning of Jesus as Lord. Wesley, after his Aldersgate experience, said he woke up the next morning with Jesus Master in his life. And that's what it's all about. It's Jesus coming into his throne rights in my life. It is, by an act of my will, my enthroning Jesus as rightful Lord in my life. And that simply means that Jesus now is able to do anything that he wants to with me. Is Jesus absolute total Lord in your life?

Really, the filling of the Holy Spirit is just the other side of the coin. If a person is filled with the Spirit of God, it is because Jesus is Lord in his life; and if Jesus is Lord in his life, then he is filled with the Spirit, because the Spirit of God himself doesn't want any glory. And by the way, one way you can tell if a spiritual movement is of God or not is the position it places the Spirit. And if the Spirit has center stage, if it's leading the parade, it is not of God. The Holy Spirit always retires to the background and pushes Jesus to the front of the parade, and the man who is filled with the Spirit will become a "Jesus Person" if you don't mind. For Jesus said, "When He is come He shall (what?), He shall testify of me. He shall glorify me."

It is a command, it is a command to be controlled and it is a command to be continually controlled. That's a present tense verb. Be ye being filled with the Spirit. I'm not advocating today a spasmodic, occasional high. I'm talking about an every day experience. I read in Acts Chapter 6 where those deacons were men, not filled with the Spirit, but full of the Spirit. There has to be a difference. Men whose lives should be characterized by fullness, a habitual continual experience, every day. A Spirit-filled experience. I think there are two ways you can be filled with the Spirit every day, that that initial filling can extend into a continual walk. Number one by immediate obedience to every command. Immediate obedience the moment the Spirit of God says, "Apologize." The moment the Spirit of God says, "Witness." The moment the Spirit of God says, "Give." Immediate obedience. The second is instant confession of sin. Being filled with the Spirit doesn't mean you no longer sin, but it means that now you acknowledge your sin and you confess it to Him. Instant confessions, getting every barrier out of the way, a continual experience. This is where God intends us to live. This is what Jesus meant when he said, "I am come that you might have life and have it more abundantly." Is the Holy Spirit filling you right now?