SUPERnatural: The Mystery Inside Memory Verse: I Corinthains 3:16

April 14th, 2024 Scripture Reading: Psalm 139:1-12

**SLIDE 1: TITLE**

Today we are going to be turning our attention to the power and work of the Holy Spirit. In five weeks from now, we will be celebrating an event called Pentecost, which we basically understand to be the birthday of the church, when God poured out his Spirit upon the apostles and people starting coming to faith in Christ. We are calling this series, SUPERnatural because the Spirit is exactly that…not of this world. And because he is not of this world, we have a hard time understanding him. And that is part of our problem. Too often we spend too much time trying to understand or explain God. This is not a bad impulse, but in our quest to understand God up here, in our heads, we do not want to loose the desire or ability to experience God down here, in our hearts.

**SLIDE 2: in our quest to understand God up here, in our heads, we do not want to loose the desire or ability to experience God down here, in our hearts.**

Our interaction with God includes both. So as we seek to explain some of the things the Holy Spirit does for us and some of the ways he works, we are also going to strive to keep our hearts open to experiencing his supernatural power in our lives.

As we begin this new series, I would like to open with a question: What is the most underrated part of a house? That part of the house you rarely go into…that part that is largely out of sight, out of mind? A few weeks ago I received a call from my dad on a Sunday morning as I was wrangling kids and walking out the door to head to church. Surely, he must know by now that my Sunday mornings are pretty busy, but his timing is usually not great anyway. Eventually he got ahold of me and informed me that he needed my help. He was replacing his 31-year-old water heater. I’ll never forget that number, he told it to me a dozen times. “Can you believe this thing is 31 years old? I was going to replace the coil but then just figured it was 31 years old…” So after lunch I headed down to my parent’s house to help him pull out the 31 year old water heater and install the new.

But as I was with my dad down in the back corner of the laundry room, standing behind the furnace, trying to get a good angle on the pipe connections, I realized that in all my years growing up in this very same house, I don’t think I have ever been in this part of the utility room. Certainly now crammed into the corner. I looked around a little bit and saw all the trinkets and bottles and old jars that have been untouched for years. I even found a pair of thin metal rods that had wooden handles attached to them so as to form a crude, but very destructive, toy sword, not sharp, but surprisingly solid. Apparently, my father had made them when he was a kid. I had never seen them before. In fact, I had never seen this corner of my parents’ house before. I was a strange feeling to be unfamiliar with a place in a house I could navigate with my eyes shut.

**SLIDE 3: The most underrated part of the house: Utility Room**

So, in my mind, the utility room is the most underrated part of a house. It is usually not finished or even sheetrock. It is not decorated, and we do not bring our guests around to show of our wonderful utility room. No, it just sort of exists. You think about it only when you need to. Maybe you need to change a filter or adjust a setting, maybe you need to replace a water heater…Here we have the heart of our homes…heat and air conditioning, hot water and the breakers that power everything…and throughout the days and years, this heart of the home goes unnoticed and underrated. We only bother to enter in cases of emergency.

Author and pastor Francis Chan wrote a book called *Forgotten God: Reversing Our Tragic Neglect of the Holy Spirit.* Is Chan being dramatic here? Does he really think we tragically neglect the Holy Spirit? In the book, he is quick to admit that Christians uphold a belief in the Trinity. We believe in God the Father, in Christ the Son and in the Holy Spirit. We insist that though God exists as three persons, he is one God. But while we are happy to include the Holy Sprit in our listing of the Trinity, Chan moves to a pointed question: Can we confidently say that we have experienced the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in our lives?

**SLIDE 4: Can we confidently say that we have experienced the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in our lives?**

God the Father is relatively easy for us to understand. We know Fathers, at least in a general sense. He is the Creator, he puts everything in place, and he sent the Son who is our Savoir. Jesus dies on the cross for our sins and rose again on the third day. We even have four different biographies about what he did and said called the gospels. The Holy Spirit…well, the Holy Spirit is there for sure but often we don’t even think of the Spirit as a person. A father is a person and Jesus is a person, but the Spirit is so ethereal and mysterious…We might tend to think of the Sprit as more of an “it” than a “he”, like he was some kind of impersonal force akin to Star Wars – may the force be with you. However, we need to maintain that the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. We can relate to him as a person. And the Holy Spirit does…stuff. At least he did a lot of cool things in the book of Acts…The Holy Spirit is simply harder to get our hands around…he is ethereal, mysterious, abstract. Chan writes, “If I were Satan, one of my main strategies would be to get churchgoers to ignore the Holy Spirit.” Much like how we mostly ignore the utility room in our homes…we can get by without thinking about it and so we do. But I think deep down, we know that something is missing…that we are somehow missing out on the fulness that God has for us.

There is an old idea about God that is based on the bible called “progressive revelation.” You may be familiar with it. Progressive revelation is the idea that God has chosen to reveal himself through history in an incremental way. So in the Old Testament, we see people relating to God the Father through the use of animal sacrifices and obedience to a strict law code. The focus is on a temple. Then, in the New Testament comes Jesus the Son of God who reveals the nature of God even more so. He walks and talks and is literally “God with us”. Eventually, after his resurrection, Jesus ascends into heaven and he tells his followers to stay in Jerusalem and wait…wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit then, entails the third and final step in God’s progressive revelation: God is no longer above us in heaven or even standing here with us as Jesus did, he is now within us.

**SLIDE 5: God is no longer above us in heaven or even standing here with us as Jesus did, he is now within us.**

The Holy Spirit seeks to dwell in the hearts of each of us. The apostle Paul makes this very clear in 1 Corinthians 3:16, “Don’t you know that you are God’s temple and God’s Spirit lives in you?”

**SLIDE 6: 1 Corinthians 3:16, “Don’t you know that you are God’s temple and God’s Spirit lives in you?”**

It’s a strange thought, isn’t it? It’s both reassuring and also a little scary. It’s implications are far reaching and even largely unknown. And the realm of the unknown is not very comfortable for us.

Years ago, our former pastor David Werner and I were having a discussion about the working and power of the Holy Spirit. And he made a comment about how we are called Christians because we choose to follow Christ, but he said that he almost preferred the term Holy Spiritian, because we live our lives and follow Christ by the empowering of the Holy Spirit. Christ is no longer on this earth, he is present with us exclusively through the supernatural working of the Holy Spirit. So I am unashamedly stealing this term from Pastor David and calling this series: SUPERnatural: The Life of a Holy Spiritan. And throughout this series, as we focus on the work and person of the Holy Spirit, my hope is that we will be better able to experience his presence in our lives.

So to that end, we need to understand that the Spirit is the mystery inside, the Holy Spirit indwells the people of God. As I mentioned before, this reality brings with it a lot of assurance. If the Holy Spirit takes us residence within me, then it follows that I have complete and immediate access to God.

**SLIDE 7: We have complete and immediate access to God.**

God’s people no longer have to go to the flock, find an unblemished lamb, haul it to the temple, slaughter it at the altar and have a priest declare that we are clean. Nor do we have to strap on our sandals, trek to the outskirts of town to listen to Jesus teach and maybe catch a miracle. No…here and now in the present, we have complete and immediate access to God because he has chosen to dwell within the hearts of his people. Jesus describes this very thing in John 14…and by the way, we will be referencing John chapters 14-16 often because in this section, so much of what the Holy Spirit does is explained. Jesus is talking about what will happen after he goes away.

**SLIDE 8: John 14:16-17**

In John 14:16 Jesus says, “I will ask the Father, and he will send another Companion, (you could translate this word as advocate or maybe counselor…it is actually the word used to refer to a lawyer.) and Jesus says, this advocate, this legal defender, “will be with you forever.” Verse 17, “This Companion is the Spirit of Truth, (There are a lot of capital letters here in this verse, which is not part of the original Greek, since all the letters in the original Greek manuscripts were written in capital letters…but, in English, when using capital letters, the translators are telling us that these terms are referring to divinity…God himself. So the Companion is God, as well as the Sprit and the Truth. This helper Jesus speaks of is no secondary version or emergency backup…he us truly and fully God himself.) Jesus goes on…this Sprit of Truth, “the world can’t receive because it neither sees him or recognizes him. You know him, because he lives with you and will be with you.” Okay, a quick note about this verse…a better translation of the this might say because he abides with you and will be in you.” The preposition John uses there is “in” not “with”. This Spirit will abide, that is remain or stay IN you.

As I mentioned earlier, this means we have complete and immediate access to God, but at the same time we have complete and immediate access to God…that means he has access to me…all of me…even that neglected utility room, the heart of my house. If we are going to be truly honest. The idea of God having unfettered access is terrifying! I have secret thoughts, secret doubts. I have bitterness and grudges that I sort of nurture down in my heart. I have fears that I don’t want anyone to know about especially God. It’s easier to think of God as my Father in heaven, way up in heaven. That way I can come to him when need be…It’s easier to think of God as a man who lived 2,000 years ago and did incredible things. And I believe in those things – but they are over there in history. I think we sort of romanticize the role of the disciples. As we read the gospels we tend to think “Wow, imagine what it must have been like to be able to walk with Jesus. To hear him teach and see how he loved people. It would be so cool to have been there.” Well, we need to understand, if Jesus were physically standing here next to me, if I could put my arm around him, if I could embrace him, I would be no closer to him than I am right at this moment. Because the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, the Sprit of Christ abides inside of me. We idealize a physical representation of God. It’s easier for us to have a little personal space, a little structure, some line of demarcation or boundary. It’s easier to have a little bit of God in quantities that I can control. But if the Spirit truly lives within me, that means I can’t just add some God to my life like icing on a cake. It means the very presence of God permeates all of who I am. He lives within me. He lives within me and I cannot get away. Psalm 139:7 says the same thing with a rhetorical question, “Where could I go to get away from your spirit? Where could I go to escape your presence?” Nowhere since he dwells within us.

**SLIDE 9: Psalm 139:7**

But if we can’t just add a little bit of God here and there…if God refuses to be an adornment we merely hang on the walls, what does it mean to have the Holy Spirt permeate our lives? That is a question that takes a lifetime to answer. But it is one that we will begin to attempt to answer as this series unfolds. But I think if we want to fully live into our status as Holy Spiritans, we begin in the place of neglect; the utility closet, the heart of it all. The place where the power to function resides. We must first stop ignoring this all-important room and instead acknowledge it’s value. If I were to do that literally in my own home, to acknowledge the value of my utility room, I would spend time in the basement observing the utilities that make my home function. I would read the booklets and manuals, I would ensure that everything was properly maintained and in top-notch working order. I might even study up on how a furnace and operates and what makes a water heater work. Maybe I would finish up the walls and slap some nice paint on them. The point here is, acknowledging the value of something is to pay attention to it.

**SLIDE 10: Acknowledging the value of something is to pay attention to it.**

Can we do the same with the Holy Spirit? Can we make time for the immeasurable value of having God dwell with us? Can we act and speak as through God were dwelling within us? Can we spend purposeful time with the Holy Spirit so that indeed the part of our lives that provides power and functioning no longer goes ignored? In the winter, when I enter into a warm house, I know the furnace is working. When I turn the tap and warm water, I know the water heater is working. Can I say that the working of the Holy Spirit is so apparent in my life? Do I function with the attributes and power of the Spirit of God dwelling within me? Is the work of the Holy Spirit in my life apparent to others? Is it apparent to myself? If it is not, more attention must be paid. We need to spend more time in the utility closet tending to the heart of our home. This includes the basic Sunday school answers: prayer and reading the bible. There is nothing fancy about replacing a water heater, but there is great purpose in it. The results of a working water heater are well worth the effort. Please believe the same is true when it comes to the Holy Spirit. The time spent in prayer, in the study of scripture, in acknowledging the role of the Sprit in our lives is well worth the result: his power made apparent in our lives, so much so that we may be called Holy Spiritans. Amen.