

Matthew 20-08-16b

Thanks as always to Dan and Anna and Lori and Chipper for our wonderful interlude of music. The lyrics to those songs are always so meaningful and apropos to our study and a great way to distill and remember the principles. And by God's grace, we live.

And by God's grace, we have a wonderful future. And to the extent that we can exploit this wonderful gift, the wonderful promise of the Father, that really is the means of achieving those things. And sometimes it's easy to get caught up in the swirl of life and not really give the Holy Spirit His due.

And we don't maintain a consciousness of His presence. We're not really listening for His influence, His voice, His convicting, His reminding of the things that we should know and should heed. And the Lord Jesus here in His words provides an encouragement for us to remember that this is where the kingdom is on the line.

The potential, both now and in the future, to serve and to please God and to enjoy the privileges, the benefits, the opportunities of that kingdom hinges on how sensitive we are to the presence of God's Spirit. If by the Spirit of God, these things are being done, the kingdom of God has come upon you and the two are linked by the Lord Jesus Himself. How can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods unless he first binds the strong man? And this is the Lord Jesus talking about the inability of believers, Israelites in the Old Testament day to halt or counter the strong man, i.e. Satan and his minions.

There was no demon suppression ministry. You can look all through the Old Testament. You don't find any of the prophets dealing with demons.

You can think about the witch of Endor and Saul and Samuel coming up. That's about as close as you can find a juxtaposition of a lady who had dealings with demons, but got surprised when the Spirit of God brought the presence of Samuel up to talk to Saul and she was shocked out of her skull. But you don't see Elijah or Elisha casting out demons.

You don't find this happening because this is unique to the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ and His leverage of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. It was unprecedented. It was unique.

None of the sons of the Pharisees could cast out demons by any means. And so the one who is casting out demons successfully is the one to listen to when he explains by what power it is done. And people who cannot, don't have any business talking about how it is done.

So the strong man has been bound and his house is being plundered. And this is our opportunity in the midst of crookedness and perversity, in the midst of fallenness and

darkness to redeem the time, to lay hold of righteousness by faith. This is our privilege.

The strong man has been bound with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. We can exploit life in a way that was not possible in Old Testament days. And God is going to give those Old Testament saints a chance to catch up.

They had very limited opportunities to be righteous, although many were. There's countless examples of Noah and Job and many others, Daniel and his three friends. But the exploiting of what has been left behind here with the binding of the strong man, that's our privilege.

We are the first to get to do that. Old Testament saints will be raised. And I had a good question during the break about, well, if children who die before the age of accountability as infants or possibly earlier, if they're, when and how do they come back? If they don't go to heaven, where are they? And you've heard me opine on this before.

And it is my opinion. I have some scriptural harmony. I especially like the passage in Isaiah where the Lord Jesus is pictured as returning to Israel with the lambs in his arms.

And lambs are baby sheep. The sheep are the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And Rachel weeping for her children and could not be comforted is going to be comforted at the resurrection.

And I think one of the reasons she will no longer be weeping for her children is because those children will come back. So now this is in the category of speculation on my part, but let's say you're a Christian, you're a believer, and you experienced the loss of an infant child. How is it going to work if they come back in the millennium? And I would guess that the family who lost that child as believers will get the chance to raise that child.

I don't think there would be a need for surrogates. I don't think we're going to be so busy in heaven that here's my child that has come back, but God's calling me to flit around the third heaven somewhere. And here's this child that didn't have a chance to grow up in time and in my family.

Instead, they're growing up in the millennium where you have perfect government, you've got restored environment. It is symmetrical with the days of the garden where outside the garden, there was still death and predation and so on. But man in the garden is similar to man in the kingdom.

And then outside the kingdom, you have less ideal conditions. But to raise a child that was lost in this life, in the next, in such a wonderfully enhanced environment is actually something of a compensation and a blessing to look forward to that, well, it was a great sorrow and tragedy to lose them now, but look at what's coming. It's so typical of God to replace something with something better.

And the restoration of that child and the opportunity to grow up in a wonderful environment, raised by parents who aren't going to make the kind of mistakes we make in this life, battling our fallen nature, and to live a lifespan of hundreds of years instead of decades is, as Shakespeare said, devoutly to be wished, that's a wonderful future hope. And so I think in some way, shape or form, there's a lot of us, and God is going to have plenty of servants available to do no end of projects and services and facets of his will in the resurrection. And to spend part of that thousand years bringing these children who passed away in this life to maturity in the next, so that they can understand and respond to the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit and be saved on the very same basis as everyone else.

Nobody gets a pass, nobody gets an alternate route of salvation. You don't have the automatic application of the blood of Christ. Everyone, the world is convicted.

Everyone has to choose. Everyone has free will. God does not obviate, shut off, or otherwise bypass the necessity to be faced with that reality.

And keep in mind that if my understanding is correct and these children come back, they are also still going to have a sin nature as we do. There is not perfection. They don't come back in a resurrection body.

It is a resuscitation body, just like the rest of Israel. And we saw this in detail, looking at Ezekiel chapters 40 through 48, along in there, looking at the service of the priests in the millennial temple. They sweat, it's a human body, not a perfected body.

I think it's an enhanced, it can last a thousand years. I think it's sort of a pre-flood version of the body. But a child who dies at the age of a hundred in the millennial kingdom will be said to have died in his youth, because a hundred will be young in those days.

But where we lack specific information, we turn to the character of God. And to think that we would be disappointed or that we would have a better idea of what could or should happen with the tragic loss of infants and small children in this life. You can trust God to do it in a way that is just going to bless everyone's socks off.

He is not a God of small things. He's not a God of inadequate solutions. And as wonderful as I think my conception of it is, what God does may even surpass that in some way.

But whatever it is, God is love. God loves these that we never even got to know because they didn't have a chance to grow up. And I have every confidence that we will be on our face worshiping God for that feature of his plan, just as we will for every other.

Whatever it is, it's going to be great. And it's going to be fair. It's going to be just.

It's going to be consistent with everything else God does by way of expressing love,

deliverance, opportunity, and accountability. Just because you died before the age of accountability doesn't mean you're never going to be accountable. It just means your accountability is somewhere in the future.

But everyone is accountable to God. We shall all stand before the judgment seat, either the judgment seat of Christ or the great white throne. Everyone is going to be accountable for their choice.

So how God works that out, I personally think they're all going to come back. And for those who had unbelieving parents, by the way, I think childless couples will have the chance to raise children in the millennial kingdom that don't have parents because they were Hittites or they were Canaanites or they were, you know, hapless pagan unbelievers, but here's this baby. And instead of being raised in an awful environment, they're going to be raised by people in the millennium who are going to give them every opportunity if they choose for God to thrive.

And if they don't choose for God, it's not because they had godless, unbelieving parents. It's because in spite of that wonderful environment and that wonderful upbringing, they have made their own choice. So, you know, the people who cast aspersions on God because he sent the Israelites in to destroy the Canaanite women and children may not realize that God, in my view, is going to bring those children back.

And instead of growing up in a Molech-worshipping Canaan, they're going to grow up in a God-ordained world government of peace, prosperity, and righteousness, and have a wonderful opportunity to live longer and have greater prosperity. So, a little bit of an aside there, but once again, resurrection is done by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

The Holy Spirit is our source of revelation. He gives us spiritual wisdom, and he gives us spiritual power. You see this in 1 Corinthians 2, 10, and 11.

Paul is talking to him and he says, these are things, what he's writing about in Corinthians, these things God has revealed to us by his spirit. He's a spirit of revelation. He searches all things, the deep things of God, meaning he surveys them, he has a grip on them.

Who knows a person's thoughts except for their own spirit within them? In the same way, no one knows the thoughts of God except the spirit of God. And the spirit of God shares the thoughts of God, explains them, makes them understandable to us. So, one of the reasons we have the presence of the Holy Spirit is not just for our personal cleansing, not for just our personal conviction and for our comfort and our guidance, but also in that communication aspect to draw us to the Father through Christ, through the Holy Spirit, we have access to the Father.

Jesus said, no one comes to the Father but by me, but the means by which Jesus connects us to the Father is the Holy Spirit. He conveys our thoughts and desires, and he communicates to us God's thoughts and desires. It's a ministry of the Spirit.

And if we find ourselves confused or powerless or uncertain in our Christian walk, look to the environment we are creating relative to the Holy Spirit. You remember Jesus talking about the man who has a demon cast out and the demon goes into waste places and finds some more of his friends and comes back and finds the house clean and swept, and he and his demon friends all move in because there's not a presence in that house. It was cleansed, it was purged, but that evil presence was not replaced with the things of God, the goodness of God, the Spirit of God, and so it returns as a sevenfold curse.

And you have other places in scripture that talk about a dog returning to his vomit, and you're worse off having tasted the good things of God and fallen away than if you had never tasted them to begin with, because in rejecting revelation and rejecting the presence and power of the Spirit, you become guilty of so much more. It's one thing to have never tasted it and never known it and reject it, but if you've tasted it and known it and then fallen away from it, how much worse is that? How much greater load of sin do you incur? So it's important for us to be aware of the central importance of the Holy Spirit to our life. We cannot redeem the time.

We cannot prepare for the rest of time, much less eternity, without his active, influential presence and power in our lives. Sin interferes with that, inattention and distraction interferes with it, burning our time on momentary, ephemeral, passing things, elbows him out of the way. Well, I can't listen to the Holy Spirit because I've got my program to watch.

I can't listen to the Holy Spirit because I've got my task list to perform. I can't be cultivating the ministry of the Spirit in my life because I'm really busy right now. I'll get around to that later.

What are you busy with is more important than representing the Lord Jesus Christ and preparing for eternity. Eternity is a long time. You can insert an emphatic word between that.

It is a long time compared to this, you know, momentary light affliction that is working for us an eternal weight of glory. Well, our momentary distractions here and our constant deflection and inattention can work for us a permanent loss. How tragic, because everything has been given to us.

Everything is provided. The Spirit is present. He's dwelling.

He's in the room. Are we allowing him to be influential or not? If we're not, we're constantly talking over. We're sticking our hands up and answering all the questions.

We're trying to guide the course of the class and the discussion instead of being still and knowing that God is God. Be still and know that I am God. Be still and listen to and listen for the presence, the ministry, the communication of the Spirit.

He is our source of wisdom. Paul's prayer in Ephesians chapter one. I pray that God may grant to you a spirit characterized by wisdom and revelation in full knowledge, epinosis of him.

Well, the Holy Spirit bears witness to our spirit that we are children of God and everything that follows. The Holy Spirit is power. Jesus told the disciples over and over again, wait for power from on high.

You will receive power after the Holy Spirit comes upon you, Acts 1.8. And that's how you're going to be my witnesses, both in Judea, Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria until the end of the age. So Acts 1.8 actually goes. The power of God is great enough for every need, every problem, every exigency, whatever strength we need to walk our path, to endure, to persevere.

Go to Ephesians 1.17 through 20. I just quoted an earlier part of Ephesians 1. If you want an example of how powerful the power of the Holy Spirit is, look at the Holy Spirit raising Christ from the dead. The Holy Spirit is the one who seated Jesus at God's right hand.

Read 17 through 20 of Ephesians 1. The Holy Spirit took the Lord Jesus and seated him at the right hand of the Father. Interesting truth. He is the spirit of truth, John 16.13. The Holy Spirit guides us into truth.

He is called the spirit of truth. Jesus said, when the spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. This is John 16.13 through 15.

He will not speak on his own. He will speak only what he hears and he will tell you what is yet to come. Need help preparing for the future? Wonder what you ought to do by way of, you know, building a bunker for the political times to come or the economic times to come or the social times to come.

If you had a crystal ball and you knew what laws were going to be, what ordinances and requirements were going to be, wouldn't that be wonderful? Well, Jesus said, the Holy Spirit will tell you what is yet to come. If you ever, those of us who are married know this well, somebody can be talking and tell you something. And later on, you were supposed to know or act on that, but it's as though it was never said.

It was said, but I wasn't listening. I, it didn't register. I wasn't paying attention.

How tragic would it be if the Holy Spirit is telling us what is to come and it's, it just sails in one ear and out the other and it doesn't register. And we, and later we say, I wish I'd known this was coming. Well, the Holy Spirit told us what is yet to come and we weren't

listening.

We tuned out, something distracted us. Yeah, there was a cartoon once where this little pack of dogs is trying to get stuff done, go places and do things. But there were once all one of them says squirrel and they all look over to the side.

And, you know, as soon as there's a squirrel in the vicinity, they forget everything and anything. Well, we cannot be distracted. He will glorify me, Jesus said, because it is from me that he will receive what he makes known to you.

He takes what belongs to the Lord Jesus and communicates it to us. If you want to be a partaker of Christ, if you want the mind of Christ, let this mind be in you, which was in Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit is the means by which that happens.

We say, oh, it's an unattainable goal. I can never be selfless and altruistic and humble and all of the things that the Lord Jesus was in Philippians chapter two. Yes, you can, because it doesn't depend on you.

If you're trying to do it yourself, that's your problem. You know why we can have the mind of Christ? You know why we can think like Christ and represent Christ on this earth? Because it doesn't depend on us for power. It doesn't depend on us for wisdom.

It doesn't depend on us for knowing what's going to happen. The only thing that depends on us is choosing to be empowered, enabled, informed, taught, convicted, sanctified, equipped by the Holy Spirit. All we have to do, you know, we're real close to historic Highway 66.

I love Highway 66 and all of its lore. And I can remember when it really was, you know, US Highway 66, two lanes out here in Claremore. And as I drive around Northeast Oklahoma and I see bits and pieces of the original mother road out there that's been replaced by I-44 and paved over and joined to other roads.

But the original Highway 66 just had this mystique. And when I first learned to drive, I learned to drive on Highway 66. But what I remember about learning to drive is when I reached speeds of 60 and 65 miles an hour, I wasn't running in my kids, I was in a car.

And I didn't have to know how to make my body fly along Highway 66 at 66 miles an hour or 70 miles an hour. I had to know how to operate a car where I would turn a key and shift into drive and hit the gas and operate the steering and the brakes. There was a power of hundreds of horsepower under the hood.

All I had to do was leverage that power, know how to operate a power much greater than myself, how to be conveyed where I needed to go safely and effectively and for a purpose by this wonderful conveyance that was much more powerful than me. Now, we don't operate the Holy Spirit the way you operate a car, but my point is the power to

travel that fast doesn't come from us. It comes from the Holy Spirit.

So if we feel like we're weak or inadequate or unable, or we err and fall short again and again as we're covered in the dust and sweat and blood of the arena of this life, wrestling against principalities and powers in our own flesh, the solution is not more resolution on my part, a greater striving and more energy in the fray. It is to go back to the basic truth that it is the power of the Holy Spirit that accomplishes these things. Do you want social change? Look to the Holy Spirit.

People aren't going to change the society. They're not going to change hearts. They're not going to eradicate bigotry or racism or sexism or misogyny or whatever else they think the problem is.

They're not going to fix the hole in the ozone layer. They're not going to get a green energy, zero carbon footprint by human means. Genuine change, genuine good, genuine improvement comes exclusively through the Spirit of God.

That's how the kingdom of God comes upon us, through the Spirit. He is also the seal. He is the guarantee of our inheritance, of our identity, of our relationship with God the Father.

Ephesians 1.13, you were included in Christ. You were sealed into Christ when you heard the message of truth, the good news of your salvation, when you believed you were marked with a seal. The promised Holy Spirit, He is the guarantee.

He is the stamp of ownership, guaranteeing our inheritance until those who belong to God are redeemed, redeemed out of this life in this world. And that is to the praise of God's glory, Ephesians 1.13. Romans 8.26 and 27, this is the intercession ministry of the Spirit. We've already talked about that.

The washing of water and renewal of the Holy Spirit mentioned in Titus 3.5. You also find the departing from and reduction of and elimination of sinful acts of the flesh. Galatians chapter five, the last half of that chapter gives us the bad and the good. In 5.16 through 21, you have what happens when you indulge the flesh.

In Galatians 5.22 through 25, you have the fruit of the Spirit. Couldn't be a sharper contrast between who we are and what we are than reading Galatians 5, starting at verse 16, go through verse 25. So when Jesus says, since I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.

I think we want the Spirit because we want the kingdom of God to come on us. So we want the Spirit to be effectual. We want Him to have free reign.

He doesn't, this is not give up, I just, we don't throw up our hands and say, oh God, make me your puppet, Holy Spirit, drive, you know, take the controls. He is our counselor. He is

our comforter.

He is our cleanser. He is our encourager. He is our enabler, but He is not a substitute for our choosers.

It is we who have been saved and incorporated into the body of Christ. And there's this idea that, well, I'm going to just surrender to God. I'm going to give up my, oh Lord, just fill me and operate me like an avatar of some sort.

That is completely opposite to everything the scripture says. We are supposed to grow up to the standard of a mature person. And knocking out your toddler and walking them around to pick up their toys and eat their peas and so on, isn't the way to get a toddler to grow up into a mature, functional human being.

They need training. They need nurture. They need growth.

They need encouragement. They need love and they need relationship. They need to know where boundaries are and they need discipline when they fail and they need encouragement when they succeed.

This is what God does with us through His spirit. We don't obviate our minds and shut down our thinking. We try hard to mature and to grow to that standard.

You see Ephesians chapter four for that. And as a result, the strong man's house can be plundered. The Lord Jesus has bound the strong man.

People trying to pray to bind Satan, Satan's already bound to the extent that he cannot interfere to a debilitating extent and he can attack us. He roams the earth seeking whom he may devour. If we're doing what we're supposed to, he's got to keep on seeking because he cannot devour you when the Holy Spirit, greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.

Greater is the Holy Spirit in you than Satan. That's what that says. So when he's roaming there seeking whom he may devour, who is he going to devour? The distracted, the disinterested, the unspiritual, the carnal, those who are giving into the lust of the flesh, those who think they've got a better idea, who ignore the convicting ministry, who ignore the sanctifying ministry, who ignore the empowering ministry.

Satan is going to devour those people and their believers. And they're going to get chewed up and spat out and be in the darkness which is outside when the kingdom of God comes in. Let that not be you.

Let that not be me. I don't want to be devoured by Satan. I don't want to be a useless addition to the body of Christ.

I want him to be pleased enough that somewhere after a long line of people who precede

me, he can bring me before his father and say, this is one of mine. The only way that's going to happen for us is if we stay attuned to the wonderful, supernatural provision of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Pentecostalism and the overemphasis of the Holy Spirit has sometimes caused the pendulum to swing too far in the other direction.

We need to be spirit-empowered people. There's no way to be spiritual without the Spirit. Jesus says, he who is not with me is against me and he who does not gather with me scatters.

Sensitivity to the presence and power of the Spirit unites us with Christ. And if you're not with him, you're going to be scattered. That's the lost sheep.

The house of Israel were lost sheep. They belonged to God, but they had scattered because when the presence of the Spirit came, they weren't interested. They went their own way.

The Spirit was evidenced by the prophets in the Old Testament and by the Lord Jesus in the New. This is why when you get to verse 31 and 32, you've got the unforgivable sin. This deserves a Sunday to itself.

And so we'll look at this next time. I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, Jesus Christ himself, it will be forgiven him.

But whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him either in this age or in the age to come. I mentioned this now, we'll talk about the unforgivable sin next time. But think about this, attitude toward the Holy Spirit.

Look at the severity of consequence. How important do you think it is for us to cultivate, respect, appreciate, be sensitive to the ministry of the Holy Spirit when the attitude of the Father and Son toward the Spirit is at this level. If God has placed His Spirit within us and we're giving Him short shrift, do you see the severity of penalty for shorting the Holy Spirit, His due? It's a sobering thought.

I've concentrated on the positive aspects and the wonderful blessings and benefits we receive, but bear in mind, in the same way that all the wonderful benefits of salvation are ours in Christ, the alternative to salvation is harsh and severe. And the alternative to not paying attention to God's Spirit, who at great personal cost to the Lord Jesus and probably some discomfort to the Holy Spirit Himself, I would feel sorry for any spirit that had to ride around inside my head. But the Holy Spirit does it.

And it's an expression of the love of God and to disregard Him and disallow Him and ignore Him, all you have to do to realize how serious that is is read these two verses. We'll see what they entail next time. But look at verse 33, either make the tree good and its fruit good or make the tree bad and its fruit bad for a tree is known by its fruit.

We are known in time and in eternity by our fruit. What fruit do you want? What's the fruit in Galatians 5, 22 and 23? The fruit of the Spirit comes by the power of the Spirit, giving the Spirit His due, accessing His presence, His guidance, His cleansing. That's where that fruit comes from.

You can't will yourself to be kind one to another, tenderhearted and forgiving. You cannot will yourself to love. You can't will yourself to enjoy.

You can't will yourself to have peace. You ever tried to be peaceful in the middle of the night when your thoughts are turning and you can't get to sleep and you say, what I need to do is just calm down and sleep and you can't do it. Peace is a fruit of the Spirit.

It is an offshoot and a manifestation of His presence and His power in our lives. And if we lack peace, if we lack joy, if we lack love, if we lack patience, if we lack gentleness, we tend to lash out and be harsh, if we have trouble finding any real goodness in who we are and what we do, if we have trouble trusting God for things small or large, if we have trouble with humility, we keep putting ourselves in the middle of the equation instead of putting the interests of others ahead of our own, all of these are fruit of the Spirit. And without that fruit, we become twofold the child of hell that the Pharisees were.

It's no small thing. We should be constantly thinking about the Holy Spirit and His presence in our lives, the connection we have to the Lord Jesus Christ and to God the Father through Him, the necessary power to live this life, to understand and have proper priorities and values and goals in this life only comes by respecting and furthering that influence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. So cannot overemphasize it.

Jesus said, the Spirit is the sign and the seal and the power of entrance into God's kingdom. It was in His day and it is in our day. It is every day.

Well, fruitful meditation on that score. We'll pick up here and investigate exactly what is the unforgivable sin? Why is it unforgivable? How does that relate to salvation and to spirituality? We'll see that next time, but we'll close here in a word of prayer. Father, we are so grateful that You have sent the promise of Your Spirit upon us to lead us into truth, to enable us to do what we could never begin to do in our own strength, to represent the Lord Jesus Christ as His body and as His witness in this earth.

We pray that as we reflect on these truths, that Your Holy Spirit, as is His power and custom, will impress them on our hearts, help us to see their pertinence and their application in every facet of our lives so that our lives will reflect Your glory and the glory of the Lord Jesus. We ask these things in Jesus' name, amen.