

Texts: Acts 1:1-9 and 1 Corinthians 12:7-14

Sunday 6th October 2019

Brightons Parish Church

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of all our hearts, be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Last week in our current sermon series on ‘the kingdom of God’ we saw that in Jesus the Kingdom of God came, that when He came to earth He was the embodiment of God’s people, God’s place, His rule, King and blessing. Hopefully we went home thinking about that, excited about who Jesus is, and ready to be part of His Kingdom.

Because when Jesus was here with His disciples, after His resurrection, they were excited, they were expectant. For forty days after He rose from the dead Jesus taught them about the Kingdom of God, and it prompted one of the disciples, we don’t who, to ask this question:

‘Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?’ (Acts 1:6)

Gathered around Jesus, expectant of what might happen, because He’s just come back from the dead, they start to wonder: is this it? Is this when we’ll see all our hopes and dreams for the kingdom of God realised?

But within the space of minutes, **we read this about Jesus: ‘After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.’ (Acts 1:9)**

Jesus leaves, He ascends to heaven, as He said He would do – He’s alive, but Jesus is now no longer present. What does this mean for the Kingdom of God? If Jesus...

is the embodiment of God's kingdom, does that mean that the Kingdom of God is no longer present either?

Well, we did miss out a few important verses, in what we read this morning. Jesus had been teaching them about the Kingdom of God and reminded them that something was about to change. **On one occasion he said:** 'Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptised with water, but in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.' (Acts 1:4-5)

And in response to the question He was asked, **Jesus said this:** 'But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem,

and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’ (Acts 1:8)

Jesus reminds them, time and time again, that they are going to receive the Holy Spirit. This Spirit, whom Jesus had during His ministry, this Spirit, whom only the greatest heroes and prophets in the Old Testament had known, well this Spirit was going to be given to the Church, to the disciples of Jesus.

Paul in His first letter to the Corinthians **wrote these words:**

‘Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptised by one Spirit so as to form one body – whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. And so the body is not made up of one part but of many.’ (1 Cor. 12:12-14)

It is by the Spirit that we are formed into the body of Christ – that in sharing the Spirit we become united to Jesus, part of His body. And so, Paul affirms that the Spirit is given to all who claim to have placed their faith in Jesus – indeed, in writing to **the Romans, Paul says:**

‘...if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.’ (Romans 8:9)

You cannot be a Christian without the Spirit – the Spirit is essential – and if you have confessed Jesus as Lord, and called out to Him to be your Saviour, then the teaching of Scripture is that you have the Spirit, you have been given the Holy Spirit. But what does it mean, what are the implications? Well, let’s take our familiar headings, of God’s people, God’s place, God’s rule and blessing, and see what the Spirit does for the Kingdom of God, and for you and me.

We'll begin with God's people. Last week, we looked at those verses from John's gospel:

'I am the vine; you are the branches.' (John 15:5)

In calling Himself the 'vine', Jesus was saying that He is the true Israel, the embodiment of God's people. But in calling His disciples the branches, Jesus affirms that God's people includes all who are joined to Jesus. But how do you get joined to Jesus? Is it simply head knowledge, is it about knowing the right stuff? Is it about attending church?

Well, earlier in John's gospel, Jesus had a meeting with Nicodemus, one of the Jewish **leaders and we read this:**

Jesus replied, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.'

**‘How can someone be born when they are old?’
Nicodemus asked. ‘Surely they cannot enter a second
time into their mother’s womb to be born!’**

**Jesus answered, ‘Very truly I tell you, no one can enter
the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the
Spirit.’ (John 3:3-5)**

**We come into the Kingdom of God, we are joined to
Jesus, we become part of God’s people, as the Spirit
brings about a new birth. We are not then part of God’s
people because we come to church, or because we are
nice people, or even because of what we know about
Jesus. And sadly, these ideas still persist, even today, not
only within our culture, but within church folk. I’ve had
people said to me, over the years...**

that such and such is a Christian, or must be a Christian, because they are deeply religious, or display Christian values. But being deeply religious, being a good person, is not confined to the church – there is in most people, if not all people, a tendency towards being ‘religious’, it maybe just gets masked with other things.

I was with a friend the other day, and he recounted going to a football game, and he described the experience as like being at church – because football, the game, had become for some people their religion, the thing that was foundational to life, that gave purpose and meaning, to which they gave of themselves, even sacrificially. It is their religion, but many other things can be other people’s religion – family, success, the list is endless...

So, maybe we're all religious about something, so being religious doesn't mean that you're part of God's people, that you're part of the Kingdom of God, even if you're religious about church stuff.

Likewise, being a good person, isn't confined to the church, and theologically we explain this because of what we read in Genesis – that we're all made in the image of God, and even though that image is marred because of the fall, we still see something of God in all of us, there's still good in people. And so, being a good person, doesn't mean you're part of God's people, that you're part of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus said, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.'

Are you born again? You might ask, how can we know?

So, here are a few ideas:

- **John 16:7-10** – Jesus said that the Spirit would bring conviction of sin. Have you been convicted of your sin, and is the Spirit continuing to convict you of your sin? Because if you've never been convicted, or it's been some time since you've been convicted, maybe you're not in a good place with God.
- **Romans 8:15** – Paul says that the Spirit brings about our adoption as children of God such that we know God as 'Abba', our heavenly Father. Do you know God that way? Is God intimate and known to you, is He real and personal? Because if God seems distant, if God is simply up in the sky to you, again maybe, you're not in a good place with God – you might know about God, but maybe you're missing out on that new birth.

- **2 Cor. 5:5-15** – Paul says that anyone who is a Christian has been given the Spirit, and an outworking of this, is that we should no longer live for ourselves but for Jesus who died for us and was raised again. Do you live for Jesus? Does He shape your choices, your values, your priorities? Because if Jesus is just a nice guy, or if you think about Jesus on a Sunday but the rest of the week you call the shots, then I'm afraid you're may not be in a good place with God.

Jesus said, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.' You're only part of God's kingdom, you're only part of His people, part of the body of Christ, if you are born again. You may not be able to say when it happened, but Jesus makes no if's or but's about this, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again. So, are you born again?

As I said at the beginning, all who are God's people are given the Spirit, not only to facilitate this new birth, but for other reasons as well.

Let's look at God's place. The kingdom of God includes God's people living in God's place, enjoying God's presence. Before the Fall, God lived amongst His people in the garden of Eden. After the Fall, God formed a people for Himself and He took them to a land He would give, **and He lived among them**, He presented Himself in the place of the tabernacle, and then eventually the temple.

However, last week we saw that Jesus is the embodiment of God's place, because in Jesus the Word became flesh, the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity moved into the neighbourhood. And so, we might say that Jesus is the true temple, the place of God's presence.

But within the writings of the New Testament, we find another change because of the Spirit. Jesus is still the true temple, but because we are part of Jesus, by the Spirit, the language of ‘temple’ is extended in two ways. Firstly, in **1 Corinthians 6, we read:**

‘Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?’

It’s a natural development of what we’ve seen already about the Spirit – if we individually are now part of Jesus, by the Spirit, then our very selves, are temples of the Spirit, He lives within each of us.

Secondly, we read these words in Ephesians chapter 2:

‘In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.’

(Ephesians 2:21-22)

Paul describes the church as a building, with a foundation, with a chief cornerstone, such that together we are a holy temple in Jesus, a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit. Now, this isn't referring to us individually, but as a community – within us, as a community, God lives by His Spirit. So, God lives within us individually, but God lives within us a community; God's place is within His Church, because His Church is within Jesus by the Spirit.

Now, if we are God's people and so also the place of God's presence, all because we are in Jesus Christ by the Spirit, then this really should have an impact, don't you think?

I think it should, and it should have an impact in at least two ways. Firstly, it should have an impact on us individually, on how we live and on what we do with our lives. This is part of the reason why Paul in His letters will say **in one form or another: '...I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.' (Eph. 4:1)**

You are God's people, you are God's temple, so live as such, and we do so by living under the rule of God, just as Jesus did. Paul will detail, in every letter, what this looks like, but he will also remind them...

that it is by the Spirit that we are enabled to live under the rule of God. For example, **he writes in Romans:**

‘...by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body...’ (Romans 8:13)

When we trust in Jesus and are born again, we are saved from the penalty of sin by the death of Jesus. In a future day, when Jesus returns, we will be saved from the presence of sin. But in our present time, we are being saved from the power of sin. And so, although we shall never be sinless this side of heaven, God the Spirit is at work within us to help us fight sin and become more like Jesus.

The Spirit is ready to help us grow in love of God and love of neighbour, **so where do you need the Spirit’s help?**

What is the sin over which you need the power of the Spirit to break free?...

Where in your life, do you need power to pursue the things of God and His ways? In some cases it will take time to change, as you partner with the Spirit, and that will bring greater maturity of character. But in other cases, the change can be more instantaneous. Where do you need the power of the Spirit to live under the rule of God?

I said earlier, that now we are God's people and His temple, then it should have an impact in at least two ways, and the second way it should have an impact, is through us to the people around us. Remember that promise given to Abraham: 'You will be a blessing...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.' (Genesis 12:2-3)

What we have, and who we are, is meant to ripple out and affect the world around us. As Jesus said in our passage today: '...you will receive power when the Holy

Spirit comes on you; and *you will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth.*' (Acts 1:8)

The blessings that we have in Father God through Jesus by the Spirit are not just for us, not just available to us – we are meant to help others know the blessing of God for themselves; we are meant to be a signpost to God, an ambassador of His kingdom.

And again, in this the Spirit helps us, that by His work in us, changing our character into the likeness of Jesus, love for neighbour should be seen. **And so, bringing a donation for the Foodbank should be a natural expression of who we are, but this really shouldn't be a one-off, this should be regular and generous, if we are going to live up to our calling.**

We can also be a signpost, a witness, to God in other ways. For example, our reading in Corinthians reminds us that we are each given gifts by the Spirit of God for the good of the Church and for our corporate mission. Are we giving ourselves to the ministry of this congregation? You have been given gifts to further and strengthen what God would do amongst us and through us. Are you playing your part?

But love of neighbour, and use of gifts, are only two ways that the Spirit works in us to impact the world around us. I came across a challenging quote this week, which read: 'We cannot claim to be filled with the Spirit as individuals or as [congregations] if we are not active in evangelism; [for] the Spirit's great concern is to lead people to Christ.' (Vaughan Roberts, God's Big Picture, page 136)

I wonder what you make of that. I suspect a lot of us will be uncomfortable with it. We'll push back. We'll try to argue against it, maybe we'll say: "I'm introverted", or "it's the minister's job", "or I don't know how to share my faith". But this writer is correct is saying that the Spirit's great concern, even His greatest concern, is to lead people to faith in Jesus.

But the Spirit seeks to do that through God's people, and the testimony of the church is that from the very beginning, in the book of Acts, up to our modern day, that individuals and churches who share their faith are also individuals and churches who are full and overflowing with the Spirit. They might not know how to do it, but they will try or they will try to learn; it will be an itch that needs attention, so they might read, or go on courses,...

or give it a shot and make really bad mistakes, but they will have a burden to share their faith.

And where that burden is weak, or non-existent, in an individual or a community, then it's not to say that you don't have the Spirit, for all in Christ do, but the Scriptures say that we can 'quench' the Spirit, we can turn off the tap, with regard to the Spirit's influence in our lives. The Scriptures also say we can 'grieve' the Spirit, and so whether it be by quenching, or whether it be by grieving, there are ways we can become less full of the Spirit, because the Spirit will not give of Himself in great measure to a people, or to a person, who resists, or outright rejects, the Spirit's concerns and activity. His principle concern is to see people come to know Jesus, and if we do not share that concern, if it is not a burden of our hearts, then He may well hold back a little,...

and that may go a little way to explaining why our denomination, and the Western Church, is in such dire straits. Friends, let's not kid ourselves: if we don't share the concern of the Spirit, then maybe we have a lack of the Spirit, individually and as a community.

But that too can change, quickly and powerfully, as we respond to the Spirit's promptings through the Word, as we say "yes" to Him, as we give of ourselves in prayer for His concerns.

Friends, I want to play for you a video that speaks of what the Spirit can do in our lives, and in the lives of anyone. It's a video that we saw on Wednesday night at Alpha, so apologies to those who have already seen it, but I found it deeply moving. [\(PLAY VIDEO\)](#)

Brothers and sisters, friends, the Kingdom of God came in the person of Jesus 2000 years ago but even though we can't see Jesus, He is still extending His kingdom by the Spirit of God. **That Spirit invites us to experience** a new birth, of being joined to Christ, part of God's people, such that we become a dwelling place of God, individually and corporately. To each who has the Spirit, there is power over sin, there are gifts for service, and there is a call to be a witness through love and the sharing of the Good News, so that the rule of God and the blessing of God, might extend to the nations.

I pray that we would be a people, together and individually, who are full of the Spirit, and as such see the Kingdom of God come in our midst. May it be so. Amen.

Our final hymn, which again is a very traditional harvest hymn, captures some of our reflections today, that we should come with thankfulness for what we have received, but also that God is up to something in us and through us in these final days, and that we do have hope.

So, let us close our time together with...

Hymn *MP- 106 Come, you thankful people come*