

## ***The Forgotten God***

The third person of the trinity – The Holy Spirit

A New Creation – Part III

April 22, 2018

*Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you? <sup>2</sup> You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all. <sup>3</sup> And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.*

*<sup>4</sup> Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. <sup>5</sup> Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, <sup>6</sup> who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.*

*<sup>7</sup> Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, <sup>8</sup> will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? <sup>9</sup> For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. <sup>10</sup> Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it. <sup>11</sup> For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory.*

*<sup>12</sup> Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, <sup>13</sup> not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. <sup>14</sup> But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. <sup>15</sup> Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. <sup>16</sup> But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. <sup>17</sup> Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. <sup>18</sup> And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*

2 Corinthians 3:1-18 (ESV)

Two weeks ago as we were beginning this series *A New Creation*, looking at the first unit on “Belief” – one of the questions asked was “if you were asked to describe God to someone, what would you say?” Last week, one of the questions was, “if you had to describe Jesus to someone, how would you describe him?” So this morning I would like to start with the question, “if you were asked to describe the Holy Spirit to someone, how would you describe the Holy Spirit?” The Holy Spirit is probably the least understood person of the trinity, the triune, three in one God of God of Father, Jesus the Son, & Holy Spirit. Yes, I say person because the Holy Spirit is not just some impersonal aspect of the triune God – like the wind, or fire, or even a dove – all those are things that the Bible refers to as the Holy Spirit being like – but the Holy Spirit is a personal being just like God the Father and Jesus the Son.

The title of my message this morning, *The Forgotten God*, is the title of a book by Francis Chan, a rather well known contemporary Pastor and theologian, and I may add a biblically sound one, who is most famous for his book “Crazy Love.” The main point of his book, *Forgotten God*, is that many churches in America today have forgotten about the third person of the triune God, the

Holy Spirit. The subtitle of the book is “Reversing Our Tragic Neglect of the Holy Spirit.” My observation is that most of our Mennonite churches in America today would fall in the group of churches that seem to neglect the work and power of the Holy Spirit.

It’s not that we are missing *something*, it’s that we’re missing *Someone*, and without that someone, we operate on our own strength and we can only accomplish what we can accomplish by our own human abilities, our own limited human abilities.

For some reason the Holy Spirit seems to be a lot more active, and the body of Christ, the church, is growing on continents like Africa, South America and Asia as opposed to North America. And contrary to what a lot of contemporary churches in America today might want to think, shuffling the deck, and attracting mostly Christians from other churches, is not growing the church, or is it evidence of the Holy Spirit at work.

Francis Chan says in his book the *Forgotten God*, “The light of the American church is flickering and nearly extinguished, having largely sold out to the kingdoms and values of this world.” If that doesn’t make you sit up and take notice, I would even go a step further and make a personal observation, “there might not be a church in America that has sold out to the kingdoms and values of this world faster than many of the Mennonite churches in America have over the past 40-50 years.”

Why has that happened? I think it is because of two very important reasons: 1) an overall decrease in the view of the authority of Scripture; and 2) less reliance on the person and the power of the Holy Spirit. The two go hand in hand.

You see, it’s not just enough “to believe” in the Holy Spirit, just as it’s not just enough just to believe in God the Father, or Jesus His Son, it’s what you do with that belief. And the Holy Spirit might just be more important to us today than the other two, because He or She, or most likely He and She, having the characteristics of both male and female, is the one whom God has chosen to live with us and among us today. And I don’t mean speaking in tongues or being so called, “slain in the Spirit,” some of the more so dramatic manifestation of the Holy Spirit. I mean the manifestations of the Holy Spirit that transforms the lives of believers so that sin is no longer master of our lives, that the Fruit of the Holy Spirit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are evident in all of us, and that we are serving God with the spiritual gifts that He has blessed us with to build up the body of Christ both here at church and in our community.

As Jesus’ ministry here on earth was approaching its end, and as he was preparing his disciples for his departure, he tells them, as recorded in the Gospel of John:

*“If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever – the Spirit of Truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”*

John 14:15-17 (NIV)

A little while later he even tells them it will be to their advantage if he leaves them:

*Now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?'<sup>6</sup> But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.<sup>8</sup> And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:<sup>9</sup> concerning sin, because they do not believe in me;<sup>10</sup> concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer;<sup>11</sup> concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.<sup>12</sup> "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now."<sup>13</sup> When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.<sup>14</sup> He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.<sup>15</sup> All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. John 16:5-15 (ESV)*

And then after his death and resurrection, before his ascension back into heaven he tells them:

*"Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."*  
Acts 1:4-5 (NIV)

Jesus told his disciples that they would be able to do more things, have greater power, through the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives, after he was gone than when he was present with them.

A.W. Tozer was one of the great Christians who lived in the early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, along with contemporaries like C.S. Lewis and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In many ways they were great prophets who could see the coming decline in Christianity in western culture, long before it was evident to most. I and many others continue to be challenged by him today. These are some of his thoughts about the Holy Spirit:

*"We may as well face it; the whole level of spirituality among us is low. We have measured ourselves by ourselves until the incentive to seek higher plateaus in the things of the Spirit is all but gone . . . We have imitated the world, sought popular favor, manufactured delights to substitute for the joy of the Lord and produced a cheap and synthetic power to substitute for the power of the Holy Spirit."*

**"The humblest Christian is called to live a miracle, a life that is a moral and spiritual life with such intensity and such purity that no human being can do it – only Jesus Christ can do it. . ."**

*"In our private and public prayers we are forever asking God to do things that He either has already done or cannot do because of our disobedience. We plead for Him to speak when He has already spoken. We ask Him to come when He is already present and waiting for us to recognize Him. We beg the Holy Spirit to fill us while all the time we are preventing Him by our*

disobedience. The Christian can hope for no manifestation of [the Holy Spirit] God while he lives in a state of disobedience.”  
A.W. Tozer

I am not sure we are even aware of what we are missing out on today as we await our future life of eternity in the kingdom to come when Jesus returns and establishes it in its entirety, on earth and in heaven, when the two will become one. Yes, that will be a great and glorious day but what about now?

Just in case I didn't have enough to read I was browsing the new book selection in the library here at church and I came across a recent one by Max Lucado, entitled, Glory Days: Living Your Promised Land Life Now. In it he says that God's people, the Israelites actually lived in three different lands during their time here on earth as described in the Old Testament: One, Egypt; two, the wilderness; and three, Canaan or “the Promised Land.”

Egypt was the land of the Israelites slavery and oppression.

But God reached down and saved them and led them from the land of slavery and oppression and led them through the Red Sea, on the way to Canaan, their Promised Land. But it took them 40 years to get there. For forty years God allowed them to wander around in the wilderness.

Finally, they get to the Jordan River and they are about to enter Canaan. But because of the people's disobedience all the adults that crossed the Red Sea are now deceased, save for two. Even Moses their leader, because of his one little act of disobedience of striking the rock with his staff twice instead of just raising it up to get water to come out, is allowed to look out and see the Promised Land, but God is not going to allow him the privilege of leading them in. That responsibility will be given to his successor, Joshua.

The Israelites pilgrimage began in Egypt, continued through the wilderness, and concluded in Canaan. Each land represents a different condition in their life. In Egypt they were enslaved to Pharaoh. In the wilderness they were free from Pharaoh but still enslaved to fear. They refused to enter the Promised Land and they languished in the desert. Only in Canaan did they discover victory. Egypt – slaves to Pharaoh, the wilderness - slaves to fear, and finally, Canaan - people of the promise.

As Christians, God's people today, we must travel the same route. Egypt represents our days before salvation, when we were in bondage to sin. But then God reached down and sent our deliverer, Jesus Christ. By his grace and his power, we crossed the Red Sea. He liberates us from our old life and offers us a brand-new life in Canaan. But for some reason we seem to be like the Israelites, wandering around mostly in the wilderness, paralyzed by fear.

Our Promised Land isn't a physical territory, it is a spiritual reality. **A Promised Land life** which is not only about the future, but there is opportunity to experience it, at least at times and in some level, here today:

According to these promises in the Bible:

A Promised Land life in where “we are more than conquerors through [Christ] who loves us” (Romans 8:37).

A Promised Land life where “we do not lose heart” (2 Cor. 4:6).

A Promised Land life where “[Christ’s] love has the first and the last word in everything we do” (2 Cor. 5:14).

A Promised Land life where we are “joyful, even in our tribulations” (2 Cor. 7:4).

A Promised Land life where we are “anxious for nothing” (Phil. 4:6), where we are “praying always” (Eph. 6:18), where we “do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Col. 3:17).

Max Lucado says this about Canaan – our Promised Land here on earth today:

“Canaan is a life defined by grace, refined by challenge, and aligned with a heavenly call. In God’s plan, in God’s land, we win more often than we lose, forgive as quickly as we are offended, and give as abundantly as we receive. We serve out of our giftedness and delight out of our assignments. We may stumble, but we do not collapse. We may struggle, but we do not despair. We boast only in Christ, trust only in God, lean wholly on his power. . .

“Canaan does not represent the life to come. Canaan represents the life we can have now! God invites us to enter Canaan. There is only one condition. We must turn our back on the wilderness.

“Just as Canaan represents the victorious Christian life, the wilderness represents the defeated Christian life. In the desert the Hebrew people were liberated from Christian bondage, but you wouldn’t have known it by watching them and listening to them. Just three days into their freedom, after crossing the Red Sea, the people started complaining and their complaining turned into disobedience.”

Max Lucado, *Glory Days*, p. 6-7

Does that mean we might never fall back into the wilderness, or remain there for some time? No. But God doesn’t want us to stay there. He wants us to experience the new life we have received in Christ, beginning right here and right now, and we can claim it only through the help and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Yes, in a series like this we can separate the different persons of the triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – by looking at their different attributes, but in real life we can’t. The three are working in unity with one another, so much so that we can’t tell where one leaves off and one of the other picks up. Jesus says he is one with the Father, “He is in me and I am in Him” (John 17:21). The Holy Spirit in the Bible is referred to as both the “Spirit of God” and the “Spirit of Christ.”

It is time to (re)claim our calling as the people of God today. It is time to claim the victory that we have already achieved through the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is time to claim and walk in the power of the Holy Spirit. We are no longer slaves to fear. We are children of God – called and chosen by the Father, saved and redeemed by the Son, and empowered to walk in new life by the Holy Spirit.