

The Holy Spirit, the Giver of Life

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[0 : 00] We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible and invisible. And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of the same essence as the Father.

Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven. He became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and was made human. He was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried. And on the third day, he rose again according to the scriptures.

He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will never end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, and with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified.

[1 : 23] He spoke through the prophets. Thank you very much. Please be seated. We had a few Bible passages read this morning, and if you're not sure which one to keep your Bibles open to, let me suggest perhaps John chapter 3.

That might be the best passage to keep your Bibles open to. There's also a sermon outline that will help you to follow along. And on the screen, on the PowerPoint later, there will be also verses fleshed up that are relevant to the sermon.

Of course, in the sermon, there's no time to actually set each of those verses in context. But I trust that if you go home and you look up those verses individually, I hope that you have seen that I have done my homework and that I have not taken any of those verses out of context.

Also, for the teenagers amongst us, I hope you will find what I say today, or at least some of what I say today, familiar, because I have based parts of what I will say today from the youth camp talks that I gave to you last year, if you were there.

So consider some of today's revision. But before we get into it, let's make sure to pray for illumination from God first to grant us understanding and insight.

[2 : 37] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, by your Spirit, you have breathed out these words in front of us.

So I pray now, please open our eyes to see them. Open our ears to hear them. And open our hearts to receive them. So that we might know the Holy Spirit as he truly is.

And not simply as we imagine him to be. All this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, have you ever noticed that we can use the word spirit in so many different ways?

Sometimes we mean the alcoholic kind. You know, vodka, brandy, or wine. The kind that leaves you with a terrible headache the next morning. Sometimes we mean something like semangat.

You know, that lively team spirit you cheer on at a game or at a camp. Sometimes we mean inspiration. Like when we say, that doodle really captures the spirit of P. Ramli.

[3 : 41] This morning, we're going to talk about the Holy Spirit. Yet, even among Christians, our language about the Holy Spirit can surprisingly be just as vague.

For example, you might hear people say they want to be filled with the spirit as though they are filling a glass of wine. Or you might hear people talk about being led by the spirit like an artist struck by a burst of inspiration.

Or maybe you've heard someone say, don't quench the spirit. But we're not sure what they mean. Is that similar to making someone lose all their semangat?

And did you know the initial version of the Nicene Creed was pretty vague on the Holy Spirit as well? After everything it said about the Father and the Son, it came to the Holy Spirit and simply

declared, We believe in the Holy Ghost.

Full stop. Nothing else. Nothing at all. It affirmed the spirit's existence, but said nothing about who he is or what he does.

[4 : 59] It was all a little hazy. But it didn't remain that way. For just as the Son had come under attack, so did the spirit.

A generation after Arius, another group of anti-Nicene theologians emerged, known as the Nomoto-Mations. That's a big word, isn't it?

Literally, it means the spirit fighters. Like Arius, they argued that the Holy Spirit was not fully equal with the Father. Instead, they claimed he was outranked by the Father and the Son.

So this forced the early church leaders to revise the original draft of the Nicene Creed, expanding it to say much more about who the Spirit is.

And that is what we've just read earlier. So this morning, we're going to explore what they added.

Now, of course, it would not be possible to say everything the Bible teaches about the Spirit in one sermon, and I am not going to try.

[6 : 20] However, especially if you are newer to our church, you might like to know that back in 2019, we did do a six-part series on the Holy Spirit, entitled Reintroducing the Holy Spirit.

So if you wanted to go and explore a little more in-depth, feel free to listen to those sermons which are available on our church website, or ask me afterwards what might be some good books to read. But today, I just want to home in on three things the Creed teaches us about the Holy Spirit. Firstly, that he is the Lord, that is, a divine person, not a force.

Secondly, we'll see that he is the giver of life. And thirdly, we'll look at that line he has spoken through the prophets, and we'll see how he is the revealer of truth.

And by the end, I hope we will see, as the scholar Craig Keener puts it, that he is the God who has invaded our lives with his transforming presence, who deserves to be worshipped and glorified.

[7 : 37] So firstly, he is the Lord, a divine person, not a force. Now, if that sounds obvious to you, let me tell you a little story.

Imagine you could travel back 1600 years to the city of Constantinople around the year 380 AD.

There is a pastor preaching there, a brilliant godly guy named Gregory.

And Gregory looks out at the churches of his day, and he realizes that if you ask people who the Holy Spirit is, you will get all sorts of answers.

Some think of him as an activity. In other words, a kind of energy. Some say he's a creature, something God made.

And some, Gregory says, simply can't make up their minds, since to them, the Bible is not clear on this. And it wasn't only the man on the street who got muddled.

[8 : 47] A century before Gregory, a man named Origen, who was a great Bible teacher on many other things, stumbled at exactly this point.

When he tried to work out where the Spirit fit, he ended up describing him as the most magnificent of created things, rather than the Creator himself.

My point is, when it came to working out the nature of the Holy Spirit, it did not come easily, even to clever and devout people.

But you might think, that was then, this is now. Surely the Church has worked this all out today? But friends, the truth is, we have not.

Just last year, a major survey of American churchgoers asked people to respond to this statement. The Holy Spirit is a force, but it's not a personal being.

[9 : 56] And do you know how many evangelicals, Bible-believing, church-attending Christians agreed with it? 53%. More than half.

So the confusion is very real. Indeed, a few years ago, in our very own youth group, I asked a similar question and got similar answers.

So this is not an ancient problem we can look down on. It is sitting in our own peels. It may very well be sitting in your own heart this morning.

And this is where the Nicene Creed has such a clarifying effect. When it comes to describing the Holy Spirit, notice the very first word it reaches for.

Not the power, not the force, it calls the Spirit, the Lord, the very name reserved for God himself.

[11 : 00] So the Creed could not put it more bluntly. You see, what is a force? A force is an it.

It is something you plug into, something you harness, something you switch on and off, something you use for your purposes. But you will search your Bible in vain for the Spirit as an it.

He is always a he. He has a mind that knows the deep things of God, Romans 8 verse 27. He can be grieved, Ephesians 4 verse 30.

Now, can a force know things? Does electricity have feelings that can be heard? No. Or turn with me to Acts chapter 13 verse 2.

Let me read it. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for me Barnabas and so for the work to which I have called them.

[12:09] So notice, the Spirit speaks. And he says, Set them apart for me. Again, only a person can say, This work is for me.

So the Holy Spirit is clearly not just the church's battery. He is a person in his own right. But is he the Lord?

Let's listen first to Jesus himself. On the night before he died, in John chapter 14 verse 16, he promised his disciples another advocate to be with them forever.

And that word, another, is chosen with care. In the original language, it doesn't mean another of a different kind.

It means another of the very same kind. It's like asking for another Oreo. You don't want a different biscuit.

[13:15] You want one more of the same. So Jesus is saying, The Spirit who comes is of the very same kind as he is.

Fully divine. Fully Lord. And Acts 5 backs this up. You might remember this rather sobering story. There is a husband and wife named Ananias and Sapphira. And they sell some property. And they bring a portion of the profits to the church leaders.

Pretending to give the whole amount to look extra holy. But watch how the apostle Peter confronts them. In verse 3, Peter asks, Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you receive for the land?

Then, in the very next sentence in verse 4, Peter delivers the punchline. You have not lied just to human beings, but to God.

[14:29] Notice what Peter does not say. He does not say, You lied to the Spirit and, oh, by the way, you also lied to God.

No, he treats the two as completely identical. To lie to the Holy Spirit is to lie to God. You see, you cannot lie to an impersonal force or a magnetic field.

You can only lie to a person. And according to the Bible, when you lie to this person, you are lying to the sovereign ruler of the universe.

Which, by the way, if you're not sure, is not a good idea. So, my friends, whatever else we say of the Holy Spirit, we must always speak of him first and foremost as the Lord.

And be careful of speakers or books who treat him more like a force or a currency or an energy or who speak of him as if he is operating independently of the Father and the Son.

[15:47] The Creed makes clear that cannot be so. But what else does the Creed say about him? Well, secondly, he is the giver of life.

Now, I think we tend to associate the Father and the Son as those who give life. We think of verses like John 3, 16 where the Father sends the Son to give eternal life.

But did you know that without the Spirit we can have no life? Let me just give one example. In Genesis 2, verse 7, we read the following.

Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living being.

Now, if we look back at Genesis 1, God has been creating by speaking. Let there be light and there was light. Let there be this and that and there it was.

[16:57] But here, in Genesis 2, God doesn't simply speak humans into existence like the rest of creation. Rather, he stoops down and he breathes life into us in a more personal and intimate way.

And this breath of life is no ordinary breath. The Bible ties it tightly to God's own Spirit. Listen to how Job describes his own making.

The Spirit of God has made me. The breath of the Almighty gives me life. God's Spirit and God's breath are bound together.

So when God breathes into the man, it is as though he gives him something of his very own Spirit. And only then does the dust become a living being.

But why is it so important we know this? Well, let me tell you of a time when I was 26 or 27 years old. I'm working as a church apprentice and it is almost midnight when my pastor, Pastor Andrew, gets a call.

[18:17] Could he come over? The church member asks. She's really worried about her aging mother. So Pastor Andrew calls me to come along and we go to their apartment.

And we step in and that is when I see her, the mother, just sitting slump on a chair. I look at her. I eventually hold her hand and it's clear. No pulse, no movement, no life. It is one of my first few encounters with death up close.

I mean, I've seen my grandfather in a coffin but not death like this. And when the ambulance and the medical people come, they confirm what we already know.

But here is the thing. The Bible says that spiritually speaking, we are the church members' aging mother. The language of Ephesians 2 verse 1 is especially clear.

[19:27] We are spiritually dead. Our hearts might be beating, our limbs might be working, but actually, spiritually speaking, we have no pulse, no movement, nothing to indicate life of any sort.

Because the Bible says we have rejected the source of life, God himself. And because we have cut ourselves from God, we don't have God's spirit with us.

And remember, as long as we are without the spirit, there can be no life. But here is the wonderful thing.

The creed, summarizing scriptural teaching, says the Holy Spirit is the giver of life. And this giver of life, it turns out, loves to give life to the dead.

Turn with me to John chapter 3. There we encounter a man named Nicodemus. He is a respected teacher, a religious expert, a man who, by every outward measure, is very much alive.

[20:49] And he has become curious about Jesus. So one night, he goes to meet him, hoping to learn from this man he regards as a God-anointed teacher.

But when they meet, Jesus says the most startling thing to him. You must be born again, verse 3. Or down in verses 5 and 6, you must be born of water and the Spirit.

The two expressions are parallel. So what is Jesus telling Nicodemus? Well, think about what a birth is.

No baby decides to be born on their own. No baby contributes anything to its own birth. Instead, having new life is something done to you from outside by another.

And that is Jesus' point. He's telling Nicodemus, do you want to be part of the kingdom of God? In other words, do you want new life?

[21:59] Real life? Life to the full? Then you can't just work harder at religion. That is never going to be enough. No, you must have something done to you from the outside by another.

You must experience a brand new birth only the Spirit can give. For just as that dear mother could never have raised herself from her chair, spiritually dead people cannot make themselves alive. Only the Spirit can. Only he can sprinkle people clean and give them a new heart as Ezekiel 36 says.

That's why Jesus talks about being born of water and the Spirit. He is recalling Ezekiel's words. But here's the thing.

We cannot control the Holy Spirit. We cannot summon him. We cannot manufacture his work.

That's what Jesus is getting at in verse 8 when he compares the Spirit to the wind.

[23:14] The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.

You see the Holy Spirit is sovereign. He gives life where he wills. But the good news is he is more than willing to do so for guilty sinners.

You see in John 3 verse 14 to 15, Jesus points Nicodemus back to a strange episode in Israel's history. People were dying in the wilderness under God's judgment bitten by venomous snakes and they couldn't cure themselves.

So God told Moses to lift up a bronze snake on a pole and the only way people could live was if they look at this snake.

Similarly, Jesus says the Son of Man must be lifted up, that is crucified, so that whoever looks on him, that is believes in him, may live.

[24 : 32] For the cross is where Christ bears our judgment and secures eternal life for all who believe. But how does that life become ours?

That is the Holy Spirit's work. The Spirit does not invent another salvation alongside Jesus. Rather, he takes everything Christ accomplished on the cross and makes it ours.

He opens our blind eyes to see Christ, unites us to him by faith, and then gives us the new life that Jesus purchased.

Jesus. That is why Jesus speaks both about being born of the Spirit and about believing in the Son. The Son secures eternal life through his death.

The Spirit gives that life to all who trust in him. And if all of this is true, do you see how it sheds light on what it means to be a Christian?

[25 : 40] You see, my friends, Christianity is not a call to self-improvement. It isn't an exhortation for you to just try harder.

It is more radical than that. Being a Christian at its heart is about God giving you an entirely new life. One you could never produce yourself. And that cuts the feet out from under two things that plague so many of us.

Pride and despair. Think about pride first. If you are a Christian here this morning, you cannot take a shred of credit for your salvation.

You can't look down on your non-Christian co-worker or neighbour and think, well, I guess I was just a little more spiritually open than them. No.

[26 : 42] You were just as dead in the wilderness as anyone else. The only reason you are alive today is because the sovereign spirit opened your blind eyes and pointed you to Christ.

Salvation leaves no room for pride, only humility. But think also about despair.

Some of you came into this building today completely exhausted. You've been trying so hard to be a good Christian, to break that habit, to clear your conscience, and you feel like an absolute failure.

Can I give you some good news? You can stop trying to resurrect your own dead soul. People, a dead man cannot perform CPR on himself.

And that's okay because your job isn't to generate new life. Rather, your job is to look away from your own empty efforts, and with the help of the spirit, look to the son of man lifted up on that cross for you.

[27 : 55] And the spirit's comfort does not stop there. Come with me to Galatians chapter 4 verse 4 to 6. It should be on the screen.

But when the sad time had fully come, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law that we might receive adoption to sonship.

Because you are his sons, God sent the spirit of his son into our hearts, the spirit who calls out Abba, Father. You see, do you know the spirit doesn't just give you life?

More than that, he gives you the best kind of life. He makes you a child of God. He brings you into the son's own place so that you can say to God the very words Jesus says.

Abba, Father. And you can do all that because the spirit lives within you. So look how far the giver of life has carried you.

[29 : 10] You began as that lifeless figure, slumped in the chair. And now, by the spirit, you are a son, a daughter, crying out father to the God of heaven.

But that raises one further question. How do we know any of this? How do we know God sent his son that the cross saves that you may call God father?

We know it for one reason, because God has Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[31 : 20] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. They noticed a little statue rat swinging from the driver's mirror. So they struck up a conversation and eventually they asked, Does your thought answer to you?

And the driver just laughed. What a silly question to say. Of course not. And yet our thought does.

He knows that you want to flash on. He steals. And through his spirit, he speaks through the crossings. That is, his soul.

[32 : 25] That's why in 2 Samuel from 23 verse 2, David can say this. The Spirit of the Lord spoke to me, His word was upon my mother.

But how exactly does the Spirit still speak? Today, the answer, in short, is in the same way. He still speaks through humans. More specifically, he speaks through the scriptures that those humans who drop us as apostles will know.

That's what the grief is getting at. And see, people often ask, Why do we have such an idea of the Bible? Isn't it just the words of man, and therefore less spiritual?

Well, yes and no. It is the words of man, but that's not all. More precisely, it is the words of the Spirit who spoke through this man.

[33 : 35] Why do I say that? Because of me, for a moment, Acts 4, 25. The apostles are quoting the star through.

But notice how they introduce the star. They come by, He spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our Father, David.

So, on the one hand, they say that this psalm is a word for human being. But on the other, we are not afraid to say that this is also the speech of the Holy Spirit.

So whenever the Apostles and Prophets wrote what we know now as Israel, they were not merely stating human opinion.

Rather, as one religious of the two of the Trinity would say, they were writing words taught by the Spirit. So actually, the first Bible is the Spirit's book.

[34 : 42] He has spoken every part of it, and every word of God. That's why 2 Timothy 3,16 says, All Scripture is God.

Just as the Spirit's graph gives life to man, so the Spirit's graph now gives us the living and active Scriptures.

And here's the key thing to recognize. The Spirit never acts as a free-luster. He never, as you would say, that's what I'm saying.

Listen to how Jesus describes him with John 16,13. He would not speak on his own. He would speak only one.

He is, if you like, the perfect ambassador. So just imagine the nation's ambassador standing in the Oval Office.

[35 : 45] Does he get to invent his own foreign policy on the spot? Of course not. If he is doing his job, he speaks only the words his government gave him.

So it is with the Spirit. As one sound of a father and a son, he speaks only young words, and he speaks them without missing even a syllable.

So, when you open the Bible, you are not reading the religious guesses of long-dead men, nor are you hearing the detached spiritual noise cut loose from the father and the son.

Rather, you are hearing the very, trying God himself speaking. But that is what all the Spirit does. You see, here is a strange thing. The Bible can be God's own retail words, yet the person can still read it and get nothing out of it.

[36 : 53] Why? He tells us in one orientation of the two verse 14. The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them, and not make a concern only with the same.

If otherwise, the problem is we are spiritually deaf. So, unless the Spirit unlocks our ears, we cannot really hear.

God's word simply becomes static to us. That's why two people can sit under the very same sermon and have two very different responses.

Many years ago, when I was preaching, not in this church, there were two couples seated on the front row, right next to each other. The first couple were visibly engaged and came to thank me afterwards and tell me how the sermon encouraged them enormously.

The second couple, well, one of them dozed off in the middle of the sermon. The exact same sermon, yet such varying responses.

[38 : 15] What made the difference? Only the work of the Spirit. Only the Spirit can reveal the truth in such a way that we can respond right here.

Now, it's important in this point to be very clear. When the Spirit opens your eyes, He does not hand you in messages outside your mind.

He does not whisper secret revelations that bypass the text. Incubation means He makes the words already on the page alive.

He never takes you past your word. He drives you deeper into it. So, be wary of anyone who claims a dresser from the Spirit, that goes free of the Spirit.

The Spirit's work is not to replace your Bible, but to light it up. So, what does all this mean for us? [39 : 23] Let me just draw out two things. First of all, trust the Bible. You might have noticed that whenever we read the Bible, we end by saying, this is the word of the Lord.

Why do we do that? Simple. It is to remind ourselves, company-worthy, that whenever we open the Bible, whenever we hear the Bible read, this is God Himself speaking.

This is the Spirit revealing truth. So, trust it. Trust it when it comforts you, and trust it when it corrects you.

Trust it above your feelings, above those of the practice, above the loudest voice of Him. When the Bible is one thing, and your heart says to the other, it is not the Bible that is mistaken.

So, stake your life on the Word, for it is the Word of God, our God who cannot lie to you. And, second, don't just read the Bible alone, but ask for the Spirit's help.

[40 : 39] Remember, the Word can be right there on the chain, and we can still fly to them. So, we never come to the Bible as though they were a textbook to be conquered by our own levelers.

We come not to master the Bible, but to be mastered by the Bible. So, before you read, pause and pray.

Holy Spirit, you've read out these words, now open my eyes to see them. And in all this, if you notice the underlying principle, never ever can the Spirit care apart the Spirit and the Word.

You see what happens to those who do? On the one side, such people end up always chasing the next expression, the next so-called best word of revelation, while reading the very book, God himself says is God-free.

You can't. And on the other side, you have those who are stuck in intellectual arguments, but to never allow the Spirit behind God's words, to convict them, to challenge them, to change them.

[42 : 02] So, don't tear apart the two. For the Spirit reveals God's truth in God's Word. But as we finish, I want to say one last thing about the Spirit's work.

In the Creed, did you notice how the Spirit, together with the Father and the Son, is to be worshipped and glorified?

And that is absolutely right. He is fully God, after all. And yet, at the same time, the Spirit does something unique.

Listen to how Jesus puts it in John 16, verse 14. Speaking of the Spirit, He says, He will glorify me, because it is from me that He will receive what He will make known to you.

Now, do you see the wonder of it? Here is the Spirit, fully God, worthy of all worship and glory in His own right.

[43 : 09] And what does He choose to do? He spends Himself drawing attention, not to Himself, but to the Son.

The One who is glorified, makes it His joy to glorify another. The theologian J.I. Packer captured this beautifully.

He said, He said, The Spirit is like a floodlight. Now, think of a great building being lit up at night. When the floodlighting is done well, you don't notice the lamps at all.

You don't stand there staring at the bulbs. Instead, you see the building, a blaze and glorious in the dark. In fact, the better the lighting, the less you think about the light itself.

That, said Packer, is the Holy Spirit. He is the hidden floodlight, and Jesus is the building.

[44 : 14] The Spirit's message is never look at me. It is always look at Him. And friends, do you realize this is where our whole morning has been heading?

Why does the Spirit give us life? So that we might live in the sun. Why does He open our blind eyes to the Word? So that we might see the sun.

The Lord, the giver of life, the revealer of truth, is lifting our gaze to Jesus at every turn.

And if so, here is how I want to finish. Don't go hunting for the Holy Spirit as though He were a feeling to chase, or a power to switch on.

To do so is to stare at the floodlight. Instead, the most Spirit-filled thing you could ever do is to let Him do what He most delights to do, to take your face in His hands and turn it towards Christ.

[45 : 29] So look to the sun He loves to reveal. Look to the one lifted up for you. And as you do, by the Spirit, in the Word, you will find life and truth and a Savior worth worshipping forever.

Amen. Let's pray. Father, we thank You for today, and we thank You even in spite of technical difficulties.

We thank You that Your Word can still be heard loud and clear. And indeed, I pray that that will be the case. I pray that You will have illuminated Your Word even more, so that it is not just in our heads, but it is in our hearts, that we might stare and gaze at Your Son, the Lord Jesus, and give Him all the praise and glory, even as we also appropriately give praise and glory to the Holy Spirit, who shines the spotlight on Him.

And will You help us to better understand and relate to the Holy Spirit as a result of Your Word this morning. We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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