

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Strengthened By the Master's Grip Acts 2:14-36; 3:11-26; 4:18-22

Can human nature be changed? Are the behavioral ruts too deep, the basic stuff of the human psyche too calcified? Are we stuck with our personality type no matter how negative, angry, or fearful we might be?

Peter gives hope to those who think that change is impossible. Christ had promised him that he would become a rock, a stone in the foundation of the church. And, as we have learned, if the change would happen, Christ would be the One who would bring it about as the Master Sculptor.

But as we will see this morning, Christ's sculpting work did not take on its most dramatic impact until after the coming of the Holy Spirit. Peter had made some progress while Christ was still present with Him in His earthly, bodily form, but by far the greatest transformation in Peter did not take place until after Jesus had sent the Holy Spirit to indwell His church.

From the beginning of their friendship, Peter had a single-minded devotion to Christ. But he was compulsive, vacillating, and at times a coward. In the Gospels he is the cocoon, in the book of Acts, he becomes a butterfly.

We see the beginning of this transformation in **Acts 2** with the coming of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the church. A new day had dawned. Prophets would no longer exclusively be empowered to take God's message to the nation of Israel. Rather now the whole of God's people, the church, was being empowered through the indwelling and filling of the Holy Spirit to take God's message to the world.

The empowerment of the whole church to be God's messengers was clearly demonstrated when all of those who had gathered in Jerusalem to wait for the Holy Spirit were blessed with the same experience of "tongues." Tongues was the supernatural ability to speak in known languages that they had never learned. Not a single individual of the 120 who had gathered in Jerusalem to wait for the Spirit, as Christ had promised, failed to experience tongues.

The church's empowerment to go into all the world rather than exclusively to the nation of Israel with God's message was clearly demonstrated by the languages which were represented. The church was not speaking Hebrew, which was the language of the Jews, but rather the church supernaturally through the gift of tongues were speaking all the languages that were represented in the city of Jerusalem on that particularly day.

This empowerment of the church through the indwelling and filling of the Holy Spirit to be God's messengers to the world not only impacted the activity of those who compromised the church but their very personalities as well.

No one more clearly demonstrated the power of this transformation than Peter. He scarcely resembles the vacillating man we see in the Gospel accounts. Let's consider the contracts!!

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From Confusion to Understanding

A boy trying to put a puzzle together was driven to despair because the picture that he was trying to put together was missing some very important pieces.

In the Gospels, Peter had the same problem. He had disagreed with Christ, telling his Master that He should not let Himself be nailed to a cross. Peter meant well, but if Christ had taken his suggestion, Peter himself would not have been redeemed. Although he had the insight to recognize Christ as the Son of God, he simply did not understand the cross, or the purpose of God in redemption. This was again demonstrated on the very day Christ was arrested when Peter cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest. This lack of understanding of the work of Christ extended right up to the crucifixion. But as we come to **Acts 2** we see that this has all changed.

In **Acts 2:14-36** after Christ's ascension and the subsequent giving of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, Peter now gives an eloquent sermon, explaining with penetrating insight the purpose of the cross and how it fits into God's eternal plan. This message which comprises twenty-two verses contains no less than twelve quotations from the Old Testament. Peter weaves together prophecy and divine providence. He ends his discourse with these words, **“Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know (23) this Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.”**

At last Peter put the cross in the center of God's program for Planet Earth. He now understood that the suffering of Christ was preordained as God's means of salvation. Not salvation from the yoke of earthly kings but rather salvation from the yoke of sin. This is why Peter exhorts them in **V. 38**, **“Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”**

The last piece of the puzzle that had been missing has been provided. Peter now not only understands who Jesus was but he now understands what Jesus had come to do. This is the most incredible transformation.

Why this change in Peter's understanding? The Holy Spirit which has just come upon them according to Christ's promise has enlightened them. The Holy Spirit enlightens the mind; He helps us to understand spiritual truth. **1 Cor. 2:12** it says, **“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God.”**

New Agers today also claim enlightenment, a form of revelation that initiates them into “hidden wisdom.” Some have a mystical experience that propels them into another world. This, of course, is a satanic delusion. For one thing, such revelations are contrary to the Scriptures; for another, these experiences eventually lead to confusion, the exaltation of man, and satanic bondage. Let us take care to distinguish between the two opposing spirits in the world.

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When God gives wisdom and revelation, it is always through a better understanding of the Scriptures and never independent of the divine Word. Satan is also a spirit of confusion, who gives thoughts that lead to frustration and uncertainty; God's revelation brings stability, direction, and wisdom.

Thanks to the Holy Spirit, Peter's mind was enlightened and the misunderstandings dissipated as he began to see more clearly God's purposes. Today the Holy Spirit, through the Word, does the same for us.

From Fear to Confidence

There is an Indian fable about a mouse that was in constant distress because of its fear of the cat. A magician took pity on the mouse and turned it into a cat, but then it became afraid of the dog. So the magician turned it into a dog and immediately it began to fear the tiger. Then, as a tiger, it began to fear the hunter! In the end the mouse was content to be a mouse again!

There is always something for us to fear. If it is not fear of poverty, it is fear of bad health, or fear of crime, or fear of death. The one answer for fear is the conviction that God will be with us, no matter what.

Remember that Peter, in response to the question of the servant girl, denied that he even knew Christ. In fact he swore, adamantly insisting that he had never met the Lord. He feared that, if identified with Christ, he would have to endure persecution for his faith.

Hear him speak now with freedom and power. Not only is he pointedly accusing the nation of Israel of being responsible for the Lord's death, but is affirming that they will be held accountable for what they had done.

In his second sermon, at the gate of the temple, Peter said in **Acts 3:14-15**, “**But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you. (15) But put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses.**” These are not the words of a man who is afraid to die for his faith! He knew that he would be an open target for the political and ecclesiastical authorities. Yet he walked into this new role with absolute confidence and faith.

Where did Peter get his strength? When Christ promised the Spirit in **John 14:16-18** He said, “**And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; (17) that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you. (18) I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.**” In Greek, there are two words for “another.” One means “similar” and the other means “the same.” Christ uses the second word here, indicating that the Holy Spirit would be a helper, who would be the same as Christ Himself was on this earth. In other words, the Holy Spirit has come to take the place of Christ's physical presence; that's why the Spirit could not be fully poured out until Christ had gone to heaven and been glorified.

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Christ said in **John 16:7**, “**It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.**” When He was here on earth, Jesus could only be at one place at one time with His physical body. Now that He has gone to heaven and sent the Spirit, He is just as present with us as He was with the disciples on earth so long ago. The helper, the Holy Spirit, stands where we stand; He sits where we sit; He listens when we talk; and endures what we see. He never leaves us nor forsakes us, and we can be assured of His presence no matter what.

When we serve the Lord in faith we have a confidence that we are not alone. This sense of the Lord’s presence is what allows us to move forward with confidence and with power.

From Discouragement to Determination

When Christ was crucified, the disciples forsook Him and fled. After the coming of the Spirit of God into their lives they would no longer be verily easily discouraged.

After the apostles were thrown into prison in **Acts 5** we read how the authorities took the advice of a man named Gamaliel in **VV. 40-42** where we read the following, “**And they took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them to speak no more in the name of Jesus, and then released them. So they went on their way from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ**” The greater the whippings, the greater the witness.

Those who place their faith in Christ may at times be discouraged, but their faith will not fail. Not because of who they are but rather because of who God is. **Romans 11:29** tells us “**For the gifts and callings of God are irrevocable.**” We may be knocked down but we will never be knocked out. How do we know this? The Holy Spirit has been given to us as a pledge of our ultimate victory.

CONCLUSION

The first change we’ve noticed affected Peter’s mind, he now had spiritual understanding. The second moved his emotions, from fear to confidence and boldness. The third was a transformed will. Nothing could deter him from obeying the command of Christ. Despite being flogged, that is, whipped with 39 lashes, the disciples rejoiced in the honor of bearing both pain and shame for Christ’s name.

Notice in passing that being filled with the Spirit did not protect the apostles from physical violence. They were beaten, and later many of these apostles would be killed for their faith. The Holy Spirit did not exempt them from flogging, but gave them grace to endure it. The Holy Spirit does not shield us from accidents, abuse, or the injustices common to man. He does supply the grace to endure these for the glory of Christ.

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Think of the thousands of martyrs who died in Rome without protection from the flames or wild beasts. Yet, many testified that the Holy Spirit gave them the inner resources to cope with the outward pressures. Peter and the other apostles walked away from their beatings filled with joy; they felt honored that they had the privilege of suffering for Christ. Emotional wholeness and stability gave rise to a determination to serve God all the more faithfully. From house to house, and every day in the temple, they “kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.”

It would be a big mistake to assume that such power was given to Peter simply because he was one of the apostles or because he was a spiritual leader in the church. The New Testament teaches that the same Spirit that indwelt Peter is ours as well. He indwells us so that we need not be a prisoner to our weaknesses, fears and apprehensions. The transformation can reach down to the mind, emotion, and will. Yes, we too can be different.

If you have Christ and have trusted Him as your Lord and Savior. You have been given everything you need to be different, for the Holy Spirit immediately comes into our lives and dwells with us. It is only a matter of tapping into the resources that have been provided. How is this done? Submission.

Can we change? Certainly !! In fact change should not be the exception but rather the rule. But change will only occur if we are willing to respond in obedience to the Lord. Submitting ourselves fully to His right to rule over our lives. **John 12:24, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”** Wheat buried in pyramids for 4,000 years grew when planted. Though the life was dormant throughout these many centuries, the right conditions caused the kernel to spring up with new life. And so it is with God’s children.