

The Rev. Charlie Holt:

And so, we ask that you would breathe that life into our hearts and minds and help us to be aware of your presence and open to what you are speaking to us. So may the ministry and preaching of your word be your word for the sake and glory of your son Jesus in his name we pray, amen.

Please, well welcome the,

we've been working our way through a series called The Spirit-Filled Life, and today we're focused on what does it mean to be empowered by the Holy Spirit. So, God wants us to be filled with all of his fullness in his life. I was once driving my daughter down 436, does anybody know where that is? It's in the Altamont Springs area,

and 436 is one of those roads that you would love to avoid if you are out driving about. It's right next to the mall, which that's trouble right there. Everybody's focused on getting their shopping done and what they're gonna be doing next, and they're not paying attention to driving, but for some reason my daughter decided that she was going to raise some theological questions with me as I'm sitting at a light at 436. And the question started with something to the effect of, and by the way, she's in her car seat in the back, she's like three or four years old, very little. And she said something to the effect, so God is a father, and I'm like yeah, and you're my daddy too, yes, and so do I have two daddies? And I said Well, yeah that's pretty good honey, you're right, and then she says, "Well so Jesus is God's son, right?" I said yes, and she goes, "Does that mean Jesus is my brother?"

I mean this is her brain going, wrestling with very big theological questions. Now she's got two out of the three persons of the Trinity, so her preacher dad is like, "Well we've gotta round out the Trinity here." So, I said, "Well what about the Holy Spirit? You're not asking about the Holy Spirit honey?" And she says, "I don't know anything about that." I said, "Well God wants to live inside of you, wants to live inside your heart, and you need to ask God to put his spirit inside of you. And we do that by praying.

And I said, "Would you like to do that?" Remember we're at a traffic light having this conversation, and she tells me, "Yes I would like to do that." And I said, "Well you wanna pray right now?" And she says, "I only pray at night."

But later on, that night she reminded me about that, and she said, "Daddy can we ask God to put

Holy Spirit in my heart. And it's a really wonderful moment and in fact all three of my children have asked that and I would encourage you, if your parents of young children or grandparents of little ones, one of the jobs that we all have is to lead our kids to the Lord and to lead them into inviting the Holy Spirit of God into their hearts. It's one of the greatest things that you could ever give them as a personal relationship with God. Of course, what that might mean is we need to ask God to put His Spirit in our hearts, right? That's something that we all need is to be filled with God's fullness and His presence in our life. And one of the main reasons why is because without the presence of God, we actually are quite powerless. We're quite weak. And while we may be talking about a four or three or four-year-old and they certainly have a lot of, you know, smallness and weakness, all of us to one degree another have many, many things in our life that are way beyond our control, way beyond our power and our ability to manage. One of them is our sin nature. The Scriptures teach again and again all throughout the pages of the Bible that we are in desperate need of being liberated from the power of the bondage of sin. And so that's one of the big ones that Jesus came to set us free from is the power of sin in our life as a condition. And this is the promise of the new covenant is that God would take His Holy Spirit and put it inside of us so that His laws would be written on our hearts. And we would want to do what He commands of us, that the law itself when God commands us, "Don't do this. Don't do that. Don't do this," actually can in some ways just make us feel guilty because we can, like Paul, Paul has a famous section in Romans chapter 7 where he's wrestling with the issue of covetousness you know what that is? Covetousness is when you like look at the Joneses and you say, "I'd like to keep up with them. I would like that house or that car or that new boat or that vacation or that lifestyle or boy he's got a pretty wife, or she's got a handsome husband or whatever it is." But when we look at what other people have and other people's things and what the Bible says is, "Do not covet." So what Paul, out of all the disciples, he

probably was one of those guys that may have struggled with that more than anybody else. Can you imagine being a single tent maker who goes around to all the different cities and has to interact with people and many of them were wealthy Roman citizens? I can imagine Paul might have done a little coveting as he went around as that itinerant missionary. And so, what Paul says is that when the commandment comes, it didn't go well for me because I wouldn't know what it was not to covet unless I was told, "Do not covet." And so, all of the sudden I have a battle going on inside of me. I want to do what's right. I can give middle ascent. Yeah, that's the right thing. But this evil sin nature that is within me is leading me away from following God. And he raises this question, "Who will rescue me from this bondage, this body of death," which he calls the flesh. And he says, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ, for there's no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. The law of the Spirit sets me free from the law of sin and death." And what Paul was teaching and what he understood was in his flesh, in his own power, in his own strength, he was actually powerless.

But when God's Spirit pours into a human heart, it actually unlocks freedom in our life so that we can actually do what we want to do. And if what we want to do is follow God, that is, the Spirit has in mind the will of God and trains our hearts from the inside out. So, the first point is that the power of God in our empowerment actually comes from within our own hearts, that God wants to give us His power and have that power residing from within us.

But here's the second thing, and this takes us to the gospel passage that I just read about the poor widow, is that this world has a lot of forces and powers outside of ourselves that can really overwhelm us. And so, Jesus tells this parable, and we're actually, "Ä¶not all," "Ä¶it's not always the case that we know why Jesus tells a story, but for this one we know exactly why He told the story. He told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. And so, He has two characters in this story. One of them is a person who is described as a judge who doesn't fear God and doesn't give one iota about people. In other words, this is a corrupt judge. This is a judge that doesn't care about justice or what is right or what is good. And then there's this widow who in Jesus' day, that was a very vulnerable position. It's a vulnerable position in our day to be a single woman toward the end of your life or having lost a husband, and we need support in our lives. We need

people to protect us and provide for us and guide us, and here is this widow, and she is up against an adversary, is the word that is used. And she needs help because this adversary is an adversary that inevitably would overpower her.

We don't know all the details. Jesus doesn't give that in the story, but what she does is she appeals to this judge. Why? Because he is more powerful than the adversary. He is a judge that has the authority and the sword to be able to deal with her problem. And what Jesus is saying is that in many ways, all of us are like that widow, that we all have adversaries in our life,

and they can look different for each person. I remember one time I was surfing with my kids once they got a little bit older, and I am not a surfer, but they love surfing, and as a good dad, I went out there into the ocean, and my son was the one that was leading the charge, and apparently these were going to be really great waves. And what I realized very soon is that these waves were some of the scariest waves that I could ever experience in my life, and I quickly was fearing for my life on a surfboard out in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. And he's just paddling along and having the best time of the world catching these waves, and I literally thought, "This is the day that I die." And the problem with being out in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean with waves that are threatening to kill you is that they never stop. They just keep coming and coming and coming and coming. That was one of the days when I was in fear of losing heart,

and I remember praying a lot on that surfboard, "Lord, one, get my son back to the shore. I don't want to lose him, but also just remember fearing for my own life that I wanted to get back to the shore. I was a little more fearful for my own life than his, actually, at the moment, if I'm honest. But we all have things that happen in our life where we feel that way, where this one wave after another, and it could be the geopolitical things that are going on, like you just look at the state of the affairs in the world, and you're like, "Economic crisis, or wars, or political divisions, or violence, or whatever it is." These are things that overwhelm us continually because they are 24-7 piped into our lives through our electronic devices and our television sets, and so they're constantly overwhelming us. But then there's just everyday life, like the financial problems and challenges and difficulties, or relational

challenges, marriages, or friends at school, or whatever it is. But life can get very overwhelming, and what Jesus is saying is, "You're like that widow." And what was to her credit is she understood her own weakness and her own vulnerability, and she cried out for help. And that is something that every single one of us needs to take a lesson from the widow, to always be praying, because the power is not in and of ourselves to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps and solve our own problems. And, yes, there are certain problems in your life that you're responsible for that you can solve, absolutely, and that you should. If they're within your power and under your authority, solve those problems yourself. That's your responsibility. But we're talking about the things that are out of our control and out of our power, and those are the things that are where, and we have plenty of opportunities for this, to ask God to help us and to be persistent.

I always think of this whenever I read this passage of St. Augustine's mother Monica. You may know the story of Monica because she's the same. She's famous. She was the one who was famously persistent in prayer for her profligate son. Her son was a prodigal. He was chasing wild women in song, and he writes about this in his book called *The Confessions*. And this is about the 400th century. And St. Augustine's mother was so persistent in prayer, not only to God directly, but also, she would ask everybody that she knew to pray for her and to intercede on behalf of her son. And so, she actually went to the priest over and over again and asked the priest, "Would you just pray for my son? I'm really worried about his salvation. He needs to find the Lord." And I know some of you have relate to Monica. You might have a child that you're worried about, maybe, that needs to find the Lord. But Monica is your person. She's your testimony and your witness. And so, Monica goes to this priest and she says, "Would you just pray for my son? He really needs to find the Lord." And the priest says to her, "Monica, if you were as persistent with God as you have been with me, there's no chance in hell that your son's not going to give his life to the Lord." And that's why she's St. Monica and why he is now St. Augustine, because he did give his life to the Lord. The Lord grabbed hold of his heart and converted him to himself. And this is the point; is we need to be persistent like the widow. We need to be persistent in prayer because the power is outside of ourself. But then he goes on to say, "But there's another side of this." It's not, I mean, the judge, the unjust judge, the reason why he gave in to the widow was because she was persistent. And so

that's one of the lessons, but he says, "But God is actually not like the unjust judge." He got annoyed with her. And we're not, prayer is not annoying to God. That's the wrong message if you come away from thinking that's the message today. Prayer is not annoying to God. We're not bothering him by praying. He's actually telling us quite the opposite, that he wants us to reach out to him. He wants us to bang on the doors of heaven. But what he says is, "God is not like the judge." Listen to the way he puts it. He says, "And will not God give justice to his elect who cry to him day and night? He calls you and I his chosen, his elect, his in a sense, his special ones." That the way that God looks at you is not as an annoyance of that unjust judge, but as someone who he has personally desired a relationship with. You are his chosen ones. Will he delay long over them? I tell you he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth? And that brings me to the second point, and my last point of this, is that, and this is reflecting on Paul's letter to Timothy, that the empowerment of God first is unlocked by prayer. That we need to call upon the Holy Spirit of God to fill us and to empower us from the inside out. But the second way that God empowers us is actually through this right here, his Scriptures and his Word. And he gives us, Paul gives some advice to his young protege, Timothy, and he gives him three metaphors. He says, "Timothy, I want you to think about these things. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits. Its aim is to please the one who enlisted him. And an athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. And it's the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything." And what he does throughout the pages of this letter is he expands on those three metaphors, and he says the first one is about the commanding officer that you don't get all wrapped in civilian affairs. And what he's really getting at is we're not to be people pleasers, but God pleasers. And then it's very easy for us to get our hearts all tied up in the petty bickering and the arguments and the earthly controversies. And he says, "There's going to come a time," this was from our passage tonight, "There's going to come a time when people don't put up with sound teaching and sound doctrine, where they're not going to be faithful to the Scriptures and to following the Word of God, but they're going to surround themselves with teachers that will tell them what their itching ears want to hear." And he's challenging Timothy and to us as well. He's saying, "Timothy, don't be like that. Keep your focus on the one who called you, on the one who enlisted

you. Your aim should always be, like a good soldier's aim, to please your enlisting officer

and not get wrapped up into the bitter controversies and agendas of this crazy age, because they're always going to be there." And then the second piece of advice he gives them is the athlete. And he says, "It's the athlete who competes according to the rules that wins the prize."

And what are the rules? Well, this is where he says to Timothy, he says, "Timothy, I want you to know that all Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching and training and rebuke and correction so that the man of God can be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

And if we don't follow the blueprint and the way of the Lord, what Paul says is it can lead to our disqualification. We don't get the prize. It's the athlete who competes according to the rules that wins the prize. Oh, they've all come in. Good to see you. We're talking about the Bible,

the B-I-B-L-E. And so, where Paul is going with this is he wants Timothy to understand that it's actually the Word of God that is where the power is for our life and for our godliness. And the way he phrases it is really wonderful. He says, "All Scripture, all of it, not just the parts we like." We can't be like who is it Thomas Jefferson who trimmed up the Bible and cut out all the bits that he didn't like. But all Scripture is God-breathed is the way that he puts it. That's an onomatopoeia. He says it's inspired in the Greek. It's theonumas. It's that God has breathed these words. It's the same language and meaning as when God breathed into the dust of the ground and formed us as human beings. And he breathed life into Adam and to Eve. The Holy Spirit, the ruah of God, the breath of God, the Spirit of God, all those are onomatopoeias. They sound like they're said. God is wanting to breathe his life into us. And so, the two ways that he does it is by his Spirit and through the implanted Word that takes root into our hearts and gives us form and strength. One way to think about this is like a sailboat. You know, a sailboat doesn't have any power in and of itself unless you have one of those motorized sailboats which is really kind of cheating. But a sailboat is needing the wind. Think about the Holy Spirit as the wind. And the Scriptures are like the sail. They're the ones that give us the structure and the direction and help us to navigate through life by

the empowerment of the Spirit of the living God. I'll end with this last thought about the valley of the dry bones when Ezekiel was taken out into a valley of the dry bones and he's asked by the angel of the Lord, he says, "Can these bones live?"

And Ezekiel says, "Only you know, Lord." And so, he says, "Well, this is what I want you to do, Ezekiel. I want you to prophesy to the bones that are laying on the ground." And Ezekiel begins to prophesy. He preaches to these dead bones and he tells them, "Hear the word of the Lord."

And that preaching of the Word, that's what Paul says to Timothy, preached the Word in season and out of season like a good farmer. He says, "When you preach the Word, all of the sudden these bones come together and the ankle bone gets connected to the shin bone and the shin bone connected to the knee bone." Do you all know the song over there? "And the ankle bones connected to the shin bone and the shin bones connected to the knee bone." That's from that story, "Hear the word of the Lord." And all of the sudden there's all these bodies, but they have no life in them. And so, the angel of the Lord says to Ezekiel, "I don't want you to just preach to them and tell them to hear the word of the Lord, but also prophesy to the Spirit and say, "Breathe on these slain." And so, Ezekiel begins to pray to the Spirit of the living God. And he says, "Breathe on these bodies." And all of the sudden they stand up on their feet in what is described as a vast army. And what the angel of the Lord says is he says, "This is the whole house of God. They say our hope is dried up and our strength is gone." In other words, they've lost hope and were beaten and they were quitting. But when Ezekiel proclaims the Word of God into their life and calls upon the renewing power of the Holy Spirit of God, all of the sudden what is a hopeless crowd of bones stands up on their feet with strength and vigor and life and vitality as a vast army of the Lord to be used by God for His purposes in this world. This is the hope of the church is that we would be a people who are empowered, empowered by the Spirit of the living God and empowered by the Word of God for the Lord's mission in this world. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for giving us Your Word, breathing life into it so that it can change our lives with its power, with its truth, so that we can live lives of goodness and godliness and holiness in this world. We pray also and

thank You for the gift of Your Holy Spirit that fills us with the fullness of life and in Your power and Your strength. So, I ask and I invite you that if any of you maybe would like to ask the Holy Spirit of God to come into your heart kind of like my daughter did on the road in 436 that you would just ask Him, just pray, "Lord fill me with Your Holy Spirit." That's all you have to do is just pray that simple prayer, "Lord fill me

with Your Holy Spirit. I need Your power." And maybe you might have in your mind

some insurmountable thing that is beyond your power and your control.

Just lift that up to God right now. Whatever that thing is, whatever that adversary is,

Lord, I ask that You would give Your servants, Your chosen ones, here Your power, Your Spirit, the encouragement of Your Word. It's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.