

Your Life

Understanding Your Impact:

Acts 2:1-4, 38-39

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As close as 5 miles, his crewmates later saw as many as 8 flares, but didn't understand their intent. Cyril Evans in the SS Californian put down his earphones and went to bed only ten minutes before the Titanic hit the iceberg. A half-hour earlier, he broadcast that his ship had stopped in an ice field. His captain ordered him to warn the Titanic. The proximity of Evan's ship made his voice very loud, so that Jack Phillips, the wireless operator on the Titanic, had difficulty receiving personal messages for his ship's celebrated passengers. Phillips told Evans to shut up. Jack Phillips had 40 minutes to relay Evan's message to his captain; instead, he took personal messages right up to the moment the Titanic hit the iceberg. Phillips wouldn't survive; neither would 1,516 other persons. There were many reasons why so many people died: the design of the Titanic's rudder and corkscrew engines, the design of its hull, only 16 lifeboats (which if properly filled would have saved twice as many people), the decision of Californian officers after spotting the flares to flash Morse Code rather than waken Evans, but a different decision by Cyril Evans or Jack Phillips would have rewritten history and changed so many lives. Phillip's decision to ignore Evan's warning, and Evans decision to go to bed, when minutes later his cohort on the Titanic tried to radio him for help, determined the fate of so many.

Ordinary people like Cyril Evans, Jack Phillips, you and me make a tremendous impact on this world. This past month we've learned that Jesus teaches that we are commissioned to

make such an impact. God in creation placed us in dominion of this earth. We have awesome authority, to which faith as small as a mustard seed, just enough for God to honor, reveals. We are commissioned to rule creation. We also shape the world through our families. Generations suffer from our disobedience, and all history is blessed by our faith. What we do in families is eternal. Third, our acts of faith shape what our community will welcome or tolerate. We have no right to wring our hands in helpless disgust because our acts of faith change the world.

Everything we've discussed up to now was true before the Day of Pentecost when Christ's church was born of the Spirit. But now on this weekend when we remember the lives of those who died in war and those loved ones who died in peace, on this Sunday when we remember the events when Jesus first baptized his followers with God's Spirit, I want you to understand your influence on your life.

Do you remember that biblical hero of faith, Sampson? His birth was an answer to prayer, a miraculous healing. He was raised in faith, and carried that faith to the end of his life; yet he did not know peace. His lust and thirst for vengeance robbed it from him. With enormous strength he began the liberation of his nation, but he never knew the liberation of his heart. He knew the joy of victory by faith, but not the joy of God's great love.

Do you remember the hero Gideon, who with only 300 men overcame Mideonite raiders in the tens of thousands? His polygamous ways provided him with 70 sons, who all were murdered after his death by another son born outside the covenant of marriage. His faith brought national victory, but his personal sin brought personal misery.

King David followed a similar course bringing great blessings to others through his faith, but he suffered intensely in his family and life from the consequences of a heart shaped more by his culture than God's word.

The purpose of Pentecost's amazing event was less about power to minister and more about power to live. It was more about what happens in the heart of individuals than in the community. Yes, the Holy Spirit was given in a communal setting and profoundly affected the vision and practice of a community. Yes, Jesus promised:

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses... (Acts 1:8, NIV)

We do receive power. We do receive ability when the Holy Spirit comes on us, and we become witnesses of Christ and his work among humanity. We receive power to minister. When Jesus first baptized his followers with the Spirit, there was special ability to speak in the language of others. They immediately had power to affect others. They spoke in the languages that they had not learned, languages of other people. However, they also celebrated from their hearts. They exploded from that building, emptying into the street, praising God in great emotion. A crowd gathered because of what was happening inwardly and being expressed outwardly. What unfolded was prophesied not only by Joel, but also by Jeremiah! He said:

"The time is coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant... It will not be like the covenant I made... when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant... This is the covenant I will make... I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest..." (Jeremiah 31:31-34, NIV)

Jesus didn't baptize us with his Spirit just so that we could yell "whoopie" and have new abilities to affect people's relationship with God. The Spirit came to write God's laws, God's wisdom, God's passion in our minds and hearts. He comes inside us to affect the way we think and feel. The Spirit authors a sensibility to sin. The Spirit pens a hunger for righteousness. The Spirit imprints a love for God and a compassion for neighbor. The Spirit renews our conscience. The Spirit establishes a mind to mind and heart to heart communion with your heavenly Father.

Jesus doesn't zap you. He doesn't strike you with lightning like the movie where Mel Gibson immediately knows what women think. When the Spirit comes on you, you don't think all the thoughts of God and feel everything God feels. You do get thoughts and you do feel feelings; however, God's honors you as an individual. The Spirit becomes your teacher. The Spirit becomes a guide. The Spirit works within you and through the actions of others. Sometimes directly and sometimes through someone else, the Holy Spirit opens your mind and heart to the meaning of the Bible, which carries the thoughts of God to his human family. Over time what we think, desire and choose become more affected by our intimate and spiritual relationship with God than by our spiritual enemies and the world about us that they corrupt.

Consequently, to the people that Jesus baptizes with his Spirit, the Apostle Paul writes:

Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.
(Ephesians 5:17-18, NIV)

Paul makes it clear that we are to choose to come under the influence of the Spirit just like you could choose to repeatedly drink wine. We are to choose to speak the wisdom of God to one another as believers, to worship the Lord and submit to one another's ministry. This gives Christ an opportunity to fill our minds and hearts with his presence and counsel.

Truthfully, God's love for you is so great that he doesn't just want to use you to win victories for others like Samson, Gideon and David. He wants to form your heart so that victories are tasted in every facet of your life. God loves you. God loves your life. Whether you struggle with depression, physical illness, mental illness, addiction, resentment, fear, bad habits, disabilities, God loves you and God loves your life. You are his workmanship in creation, and you are to be his craftsmanship in redemption. It is not important what you've been or what you are. It is only important what God wants you to be, and what you can be in faith.