



“Sing from Your Heart to God”

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I. Introduction

The Israelites were being led by God from Egypt to a land that was promised to them. On their way God filled 70 leaders of the tribes with His Spirit. And when they were filled with the Spirit, they prophesied the greatness of God’s faithfulness to Israel.

At another time, Samuel the prophet was told by God to anoint Saul as the king. After his anointing the account says, “God changed Saul’s heart” so that he was able to prophesy the greatness of the Lord’s reign.

When Mary was filled with the Spirit regarding the birth of Jesus, she also broke out in prophesy. She said,...

*My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.*

*His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.*

The 70 leaders of the tribes of Israel, Saul and Mary, the servant of God who would bear God’s own Son, are examples of those whom the Spirit fills with the glory of God. That glory comes out through their declaration for all to hear of God’s goodness and promises. The Spirit fills these brothers and sisters of faith so that they would be thankful to the God who sustains them in any situation.

Imagine being one member of the tribes of Israel out in the Wilderness. You have no home. You’re living in tents. Your food comes daily in the form of bread or manna. You have no store of food. You don’t know where you are going. The Spirit leads you each day. You must completely trust in his guidance.

Imagine a prophet approaches you, a shepherd, and tells you that you are now the king of a nation! Imagine the fear that he felt with this sudden great responsibility cast upon his shoulders. We know from the account of Saul that he was so afraid that he hid when the prophet told the leaders of Israel that he was chosen by God as the king.

Imagine the fear Mary felt when an angel approached her and told her that she would bear the Son of God. We know that Joseph was nervous and was seeking a way to quietly divorce Mary. Imagine the great responsibility and yet having very little to provide and protect the young child.

But in the midst of these challenging times, the Spirit filled each of them so that they could be joyful and thankful to God. They saw, with the help of the Spirit, that they had everything they could need through oneness with God and His Spirit.

In today's short passage in Ephesians, we will unpack these moments in the lives of the 70 elders, Saul and Mary. We will see Paul speaking to the early church in Ephesus and to us today that we ought to be filled with God's Spirit regardless of our circumstances so that we might be filled with God's presence, so that we might be filled with songs of thankfulness.

II. Context

Before we unpack today's passage, let's first look at what precedes it. In Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus, Paul encourages the church to "cast off" their old way of living. He tells them to no longer try to work out their salvation. When people tried to obey the law, when they tried to be righteous, they found that their sin became more apparent. Trying to be righteous in the flesh, they found themselves feeling "bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice."

Paul tells them not to live in the flesh, not to live through greater moral discipline, but instead to be filled and guided by God's Spirit. Being filled and guided by the Spirit, to be living a shared life with God is our new self. We are not made to live independently of God. Although we can live independently of others we cannot with regard to God. By walking with or following God, we can fulfill righteousness. Paul is reminding the church to live out this new self with fear and trembling because God is active in them. Paul concludes that they are "children of light" and being "children of light" they are to walk and be guided by God's Spirit.

III. Unpack

In our passage today, Paul tells the church in Ephesus to...

Walk with God's Spirit and allow Him to fill their hearts with songs of thankfulness.

1.) Walk with God's Spirit...

By saying, "be filled with the Spirit," Paul is reminding the church of the truth that they have been given the Spirit so that they might be one with God. They were to remember Jesus' prayer for them that "all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you...so that they may be brought to complete unity." The followers of Jesus were now restored children of God. No longer would they live life in the flesh, but by God's Spirit.

But the church often reverted back to living just by the flesh. Maybe by force of habit they would return to the habit of trying to become righteous on their own efforts. Like the church in Galatia, some would abandon following Jesus through the Spirit and would instead try to become righteous by obeying the law.

In his letter to the church in Galatia, Paul calls that "foolish!" He reminds the church, "Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?"

There is within the church in Ephesus, those that come to faith in Jesus and were filled with the Spirit, but then they may have thought that they still needed to try to obey the law by their own effort. They may have thought that Jesus had forgiven them and made them clean in order that they might now be able to fulfil the law by themselves.

No, said Paul! We were never made to live out the law by ourselves, by our flesh. We were made to live in union with God and reveal His righteousness in us thereby fulfilling the law. We were made for this at creation. Jesus restored this by taking upon himself our punishment for sin so that we might be one with God again, being filled and guided by His Spirit. The church is to always be filled and guided by the Spirit.

2.) ...and allow Him to fill your heart with songs...

By saying “speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord,” Paul is saying that when the church is filled with the Spirit, their hearts will be filled to overflow. Songs will come out of the hearts of those regardless of their circumstances. David, who was persecuted by Saul, hunted that he would be murdered for being chosen by God! David, perhaps hiding in caves would lift up his voice and say,

*The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
he refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths
for his name's sake.
Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.*

*You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord
forever.*

When we, in our own fleshly efforts, would be discouraged by persecution and filled with rage, we find in David, who is filled with the Spirit, songs! Not natural for this fallen world, but consistent with children of God. Children who rely on God and His Spirit to fulfil His will and righteousness.

But why does Paul say that songs will be produced from those who are filled with the Spirit? Remember how Moses and the Israelites sang to the Lord after they had made it safely through the sea? They walk through the sea safely being pursued by the armies of Egypt. When they made it safely to the other side of the sea, the Lord caused the sea to engulf the Egyptian army, saving Israel from complete annihilation. Their joyful relief and response was a song.

*“I will sing to the Lord,
for he is highly exalted.
Both horse and driver
he has hurled into the sea.*

*“The Lord is my strength and my defence;
he has become my salvation.
He is my God, and I will praise him,
my father’s God, and I will exalt him.
The Lord is a warrior;
the Lord is his name.*

Songs arise in those that have escaped great catastrophe. Songs arise in those that are filled with joy knowing they were kept safe in the midst of great danger. Songs are the appropriate response for those that are embraced by God’s presence through the filling of His Spirit. Paul is reminding the church in Ephesus that they were once enemies of God and rightfully judged. But through faith in the provision of Jesus, they were fully restored as children of God, rescued and enjoying an inheritance in heaven.

3.) ...of thankfulness

By saying, “always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,” Paul is showing the church the proper response to God for the gift of His Son. They will be filled with the Spirit and realize they are again one with God and His Kingdom. They are rescued, just as Lot was by his uncle Abram. Lot who was held captive by kings of the north, was rescued by Abram and his belongings were completely restored.

Lot would have been wise to always remember this event. Lot would have been wise that no matter his future circumstances, his life and possessions were prolonged because of his uncle. For the church in Ephesus, Paul is reminding them to always remember what Jesus had purchased for them on the cross. The church would be wise to always keep before them, the knowledge that they were rescued from certain judgment and death.

There is a helpful passage in the book of Deuteronomy where God tells Israel to be kind to those who are being released from their service because of financial obligations. They are told that when they release these people from service, they are not to, “send them away empty-handed.” They are to, “supply them liberally from your flock, your threshing floor and your winepress. Give to them as the LORD your God has blessed you. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you.” Israel was being called to be thankful by remembering God’s redemption of them in Egypt.

Paul is telling the church in Ephesus, to be filled with God's Spirit knowing that they can enjoy union with God and His presence. They can enjoy this freedom continually because of Jesus. If they remember this rescue from the slavery to sin, they will always be thankful; so thankful that they will even be filled with songs.

IV. Application

What is our application for today?

1.) Walk by the Spirit

It is very easy to walk by the flesh. By that I mean that it is easy for us to try to control our futures. We can justify our desire to plan our own lives by saying we are being wise. We can calculate what we should be doing now to save for our futures. There is wisdom in this! But is the planning or calculation only for ourselves? Living by the flesh, we tend to cling to wisdom that benefits only ourselves. We're afraid for ourselves and so we take control, as much as we can, of our lives in order that we might feel better about ourselves.

Walking by the Spirit, we have to let go of control. Sure we can save for our futures, but not for the sole purpose of making ourselves feel better about ourselves. We save so we can give for God's work in our families and communities. In the flesh, we can save so we can merely sustain our current lifestyle. By maintaining our lifestyle we might feel better about ourselves. Walking in the Spirit, we restrict our lifestyle in order that we might give for God's purposes, what the Spirit is calling us to financially support.

I had a friend in my first church in Hawaii named Bill Leong, who worked for the United States Tennis Association. He had been a professional tennis player and he and his sisters were all graduates from Ivy-league schools. When his father passed away, Bill gave his eulogy. His father was a banker who had been born in Myanmar. Bill told us that his father, even though he had a good job, used to sacrifice so he could give to his children when they were growing up. His father would do things like bring simple peanut butter sandwiches to work, anything to save in order to provide for his children's education. When Bill shared this, he became so emotional that he had to stop. So great was his father's love that he found it very difficult to continue.

Two kinds of wisdom. Living by the flesh in order to feel good about ourselves or following the Spirit in order to save and spend according to His guidance and love.

2.) Be filled with songs of thankfulness

When we are filled with the Spirit, he will fill us with songs of thankfulness. We won't go around merely intellectually acknowledging God's goodness to us. We will be like David and Mary, filled with such joy and thankfulness that we express it with song. Too often we can reduce our relationship with God with only rational argument. We can assume that walking with God means only having the right arguments or information about God. But what does that create in us? Argumentative and prickly personalities that zealously seek out error in others in order that we might "correct" them.

Walking in the Spirit, brings joy. So much so, that we would sing out our thankfulness to God so that others might hear. I realize that when I say “sing out” many of us might say, “Not me! I have a horrible voice!” But when we say that, we may show that we are nervous about what others would think about us. What if, instead of singing loudly, we sang with the Spirit in a way that shared the joy we felt.

Just yesterday, I was in line to get my COVID booster shot here in Milford. As I was waiting in line, I went through the songs for Sunday. I sang them in line both to practice them but to also trust that the Spirit would fill me with the joy that the words expressed. I didn't sing very loudly, but I lifted up my heart to the Spirit and sang as an expression of my thankfulness. Even though I didn't sing loudly, people around me could tell that I was thankful!

Many of us already know this truth about God's Spirit. Many of us know that he would put a song on our hearts as we walk with him. When Jo and I were attending Windsor Park when we first arrived in New Zealand, we heard a testimony from an older gentleman whose wife had passed away many years ago. She had early stages of Alzheimer's and had gone out for a walk which was her daily habit. But one day she never returned from her walk. They later found that she had been killed.

This grieving husband shared that through this most difficult and painful moment in his life, the only thing that got him through it were songs about God. When he would sing, the Spirit would lift his heart to God, and he always found comfort and support. May we all be as this older brother in the faith, followers of God's Spirit by lifting up our hearts to sing our thankfulness to God. Singing songs of thankfulness, allowing the Spirit to lift our hearts up to the Lord, we will find the strength and power to go through any storm and others will see in us, God's presence that keeps us safe.

V. Conclusion

Walk with God's Spirit and allow Him to fill your hearts with songs of thankfulness.