

Sermon for Sunday, February 2, 1975 by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
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WHEN YOU'RE SNAGGED ON A LIMB

St. Luke 19:1-10

Ephesians 5:15-20

Text: "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit..." Ephesians 5:18

Last Sunday I preached a sermon entitled, "When Life Has You Up A Tree." Since today's sermon is designed to be a sequel to it, let me remind you briefly of the content of that sermon. We talked about Zacchaeus who, we are told, was a man of short stature. Because of that, and perhaps because of other factors at work in his life, he carried certain driving needs into life - the need to have authority over others, so he became a tax collector. But even then his needs were not met, so he drove himself to succeed and became a chief tax collector. But those insatiable needs drove him on and we are told that he became rich. Richness did not satisfy and those burning needs drove him to sin, for his fellow townsmen called him a sinner.

Well, many of us can sympathize with Zacchaeus. We, too, have emotional and psychological needs that we only dimly understand, if at all. We know what it is like to be driven people, compelled and impelled by our needs to do things that ultimately do not satisfy. Many of us have discovered that to achieve the goals we set for ourselves does not bring the satisfaction and fulfillment we longed for. And those same needs have driven us to do shameful things for which we are sorry. Somehow we wish we could control those needs, or have them met in a way that life would be fulfilled and we could be at peace.

We saw that Zacchaeus was characterized by several things. First, he had a desire to see Jesus because he was looking for some answers to life. Perhaps he thought he would find that answer in Jesus. But merely wanting something or desiring something is not the same thing as making a decisive, life-changing decision about it. So, when Zacchaeus saw in Jesus something that would meet his needs, he made a decision. He acted on his desires with decision - decision that radically changed him. Then, in the moment of his decision, we saw the good news of the Bible. You see, as he decided, deliverance came to him. He knew what it was to have his needs met in Jesus; he knew what it was to have a new life. We, too, can have such a deliverance. It won't come by merely wanting it, desiring it. No, it takes a decision on our part - a decision that reaches to the very core of our being - a decision such as Zacchaeus made when he said, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore him fourfold."

But the point of the sermon, I think, is this: when we make such a decision, Jesus - by the power of the Holy Spirit - enters into our lives to help us with that decision. He helps us break the bondage of our needs. He helps us truly become what we have decided to be. And that is deliverance.

This morning I want to take that sermon one step further. You see, even when I make a decision for Christ - even when I decide to change my life-style, to live my life as I know he wants me to live it - then I discover some things about myself that I had not known before. I discover that old habit patterns persist. I discover that old, bad patterns of thinking come back. I discover that needs I had sometimes get buried rather than dealt with and they rear their ugly heads from the depths of my subconsciousness to trouble and plague me. The fact is, even when I make a decision for Jesus, I discover the old me, the old man, the

fleshy man, is still very much alive. As St. Paul once wrote, "We know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." He goes on to add, "I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do."

So, while life often has me up a tree, when I decide for Jesus and try to get out of that tree, I discover that I'm snagged on a limb. It is a limb of habit, a limb of old patterns, a limb of suppressed needs. Do you have that problem, too? Isn't it true for most of us that even when we decide for Jesus, we discover ourselves snagged on a limb?

See how it works. We decide that we will not argue and fight with our mate. But something comes along and we lose our temper. And before we know it, we have broken our commitment, we have violated our intention and we are fighting like crazy. Or suppose, again, that we make up our minds not to be lustful. Then when the first pretty girl walks by, we suddenly discover that our fantasy has already betrayed us and we are doing the very thing we said we wouldn't. Or again we decide that we will not long for the things of the world - then the new cars come out, or the dresses go on sale, or we see a new piece of furniture - and suddenly we are longing and yearning for the very things we said we wouldn't.

Well, how do you deal with the old you? How do you handle those old habit patterns, old ways of thinking and acting and doing? Indeed, how do we get ourselves un-snagged from that limb? The answer to that problem is our text for this morning. There we read, "but be filled with the Spirit."

If life has you up a tree, and if you have decided you want to get out of that tree by changing your habits and patterns, and life-style, and if you discover that those are the very things that snag you on a limb, Jesus delivers you from yourself by giving you the power of the Holy Spirit to work in your life. And His Spirit in you can change those habits, correct those thought patterns, and make you into a new person.

So this morning I want to tell you how to be filled with the Holy Spirit. In the 8th Chapter of Romans, St. Paul tells us that it is by the Spirit that we get un-snagged. He writes, "if..(you live) by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body...For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship." So, if we made a decision for Jesus, and if he delivers us by the power of His Spirit at work in us to help us overcome the old man, we need to be filled by that Spirit. Let me give you four simple steps for being filled with the Holy Spirit.

The first step is this: examine your life and confess to God all of the sin that you know about. That may take some time and thought, but confess your sin! You may want to get a sheet of paper - or maybe several sheets! Write down every sin you can think of. When you have done that, confess those sins and ask God's forgiveness. When you have done that, destroy that paper, burn it up. You see, the Bible gives us a wonderful promise. It says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (I John 1:9)

Now, the reason we need to confess our sins is so that we can be cleansed of them. God fills only clean vessels. God gives his Spirit only to the cleansed life. As St. Paul once wrote to young Timothy, "If any one purifies himself

from what is ignoble, then he will be a vessel for noble use, consecrated and useful...ready for any good work." (II Tim. 2:21) In the act of confessing our sins, God forgives them and cleanses us and takes away our unrighteousness. It is only when we are clean vessels that we are candidates for being filled with the Holy Spirit.

So the first step is to confess and be cleansed. The second step is to yield yourself completely to God. St. Paul puts it this way, "...yield yourselves to God as men who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments of righteousness." (Rom. 6:13) Are there some things in your life that you really don't want to give up? Are there some things you are doing that you really don't want to quit doing? Is there something you are afraid God will ask you to do that you don't want to do? Then, you can never be filled with the Holy Spirit. You must yield every area of your life to God. You must surrender everything to him. You must trust him so completely that you dare to put all you have and are under his command.

You know, it is right here that so many of us run into trouble. We want the benefits and fruits of the Christian life, but we are reluctant to pay the price. We want to bargain with God and get him to reduce the cost. We want to hold back some area of our lives. A lady once told me, "My problem is giving up my anger. When somebody has done me wrong and I can really explode with self-righteous anger, it gives me a lot of pleasure. I actually enjoy the emotion of getting angry." Well, many of us have other areas of our lives that we don't want to give up. But to be filled with the Holy Spirit requires that we yield ourselves completely to God.

The third step in being filled with the Spirit is to ask to be filled. That is simple enough, isn't it? If you want to be filled, ask to be filled. In the Gospel of Luke we are told in the words of Jesus, "Ask and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." And then he adds, "...how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:9 and 13) It is a strange thing, but we Christians often don't enjoy the blessings God has for us simply because we don't ask him. As James writes, "you do not have, because you do not ask." (James 4:2) If you want to be filled with the Holy Spirit, first confess your sins and be cleansed. Second, yield yourself completely to God. And third, ask God to fill you with His Spirit.

The fourth step is this: Believe you are filled. Many people come to step forth and falter. They ask to be filled and then nothing happens. There is no bolt of lightening, no flashing stars, no Damascus Road experience. They feel nothing. There is no emotional experience. So they say something like this, "Well, it didn't happen. I didn't feel a thing." Has that ever happened to you?

But let me ask you a question. Do you believe in God and his word because of how you feel? Are you putting your faith in your feelings? That's dangerous business. Suppose you did feel something, but woke up in the morning with an upset stomach and a headache. How do you feel then? Can our faith ever be tied to anything so fickle and uncertain as our feelings? Well, of course not! We trust God not because of how we feel, but because of his Word. He makes a promise that if we ask him, he will give us the Holy Spirit. So, if we ask, we trust that his Word is good. We believe not because of what we feel but because of what his Word says. As we find in I John, "And this is the confidence which

we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us."

Yes, many of us discover that life has us up a tree. We long to be different and to change who and what we are. We make a decision for Jesus, but discover that we are snagged on a limb—we are the victims of old habits, old patterns of thought, old ways of acting and relating. Our intentions are good, but the old man refuses to die. But Jesus offers us deliverance from ourselves. He offers us the power of the Holy Spirit to work within our lives to enable us to overcome the old us. We get unsnagged from the limb when we are filled with His Spirit. You can get out of your tree this morning if you decide for Jesus and ask him to fill you with his Spirit. You see, when you are filled with the Holy Spirit, no limb on your tree can hold you.