

SERMON NOTES & STUDY GUIDE • 2/12/17

# MOVEMENT

Our sermon series, **MOVEMENT**, is an exploration of 2 Corinthians. The focus of the series is on the church. The church is not a building. The church is not even a conglomeration of people. The church is a movement, a group of people 'called out' (ekklesia) to meet and glorify God, and to represent His Kingdom to a broken world. The church doesn't sit still; it moves and grows. To be a Christian is to be on the move! Throughout this series we will explore what it means to be a part of this **Movement** of God.

## SPIRIT TO THE DEJECTED • 2 Corinthians 3:7-17 • Tim McConnell • February 12, 2017

Spirit is a funny word. It can be used in a lot of different ways. We say a person has spirit. A child has spirit if she's rambunctious. We talk about team spirit or school spirit—I've got spirit, yes I do; I've got spirit how 'bout you? When things are good, spirits are high. When things aren't as good, spirits are low. A city can have a spirit about it. For example, in my former home of Atlanta spirits were really, really high Sunday night. For the first quarter, the second quarter, the beginning of the third quarter...spirits were really high. Commentators were saying, "No team has ever overcome more than a ten-point deficit;" "Well, no doubt Julio Jones just secured his MVP;" "28 to 3 folks, it's over!" Spirits were very, very high. But then the forces of evil—oh, sorry, I misread that—the New England Patriots... scored 31 unanswered points to win the first overtime victory in Super Bowl history! And spirits in Boston went high—and spirits in Atlanta went...well, back to normal.

See, there can be a spirit to a city. There can be a spirit to a town. A crowd can have its own sort of spirit, or a nation—a spirit of nationalism or a spirit of despair among a people. What dictates the spirit in here? Or should I ask "Who" dictates the spirit in here, as we gather, as we are the church? Who gets to set the stage, the paradigm, the mood of this place? Paul writes to our little church in Corinth. This little embattled community. Where does your spirit come from? What sort of spirit do you find in this place among this group? There they are huddled together. I remember F. B. Meyer's picture of them gathered on a Friday night, as they were accustomed to for Sabbath, in the middle of the party scene of Corinth. You can imagine soldiers and sailors, slaves and prostitutes, priestesses of the Temple of Venus, all out on the streets. The Isthmian Games, held every three years, established the city as a betting and gambling center filled with pumped up athletes and egos. F. B. Meyer writes, "But within the little meeting-place all is hushed and still. Paul is speaking of things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived." (*Paul*, p. 107) Who dictates the spirit in here? What is the church?

There was a spirit to that gathering. And it wasn't dictated by outside forces, and it wasn't in reaction to outside forces. The church didn't wait to measure the political or cultural mood, then set itself up in counterbalance or in concert with the surrounding city. The more I study this period the more I see how the Corinthians lived under some of the most powerful governing regimes in human history. When a new emperor came in, he would publish new edicts, new decrees. A pronouncement from Caesar was called a "*euange-*

*lion*"—a piece of good news. Was it always good? No! In fact, it was rarely good for Christians. But if the emperor says it's good news, it's good news. But one night an angel came to a group of shepherds when Jesus was born and said, "Behold, I bring you good news—a *euangelion*—straight from God in heaven!" Paul writes to the little church in Corinth about their spirit. What dictates your spirit? Do you know how this church started in Corinth? A Christian woman, Priscilla, along with her husband Aquila also a believer, they were exiled from Rome when the Emperor Claudius expelled all the Jews and Christians from the city in one decree—he emptied the Jewish Quarter of Rome. So these two show up in Corinth, and there they meet Paul, and Silas, and Timothy. And they look at each other, and someone smiles and says, "Let's start a church! Right here! I mean, what do we have to lose?" That's the overcoming Spirit of God. Who dictates your spirit? We must not allow the spirit of the age to dictate the spirit of the church.

What is the spirit in here? In here we gather in the presence of Jesus. In here we rehearse the reality of our citizenship in the Kingdom of God. What's the Kingdom of God? The Kingdom of God is where God is the King. The Kingdom of God is where the agenda is His agenda, where the values are His values, where the mood, the tone, the culture, the spirit of the place all belong to Him to command and dictate. Who gets to say what the spirit is in here? Verse 17: "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." Repeat that with me. Do you believe it? In the church, God dictates the tone. Among the people of God, God determines the attitude, God sets the culture. God governs the spirit of His people. Why? Because God is the Spirit! We have the Holy Spirit among us—that is our Spirit. And that Spirit is not blown here or there by politics, or by economics, or by cultural forces outside the church. The Spirit of the Body of Christ is determined by the glory of the victories of Christ.

If Boston is spirited this week by winning the Super Bowl, if the CC Tigers get a boost of spirit because they beat Minnesota on the hockey rink, if you feel a boost of spirit when one thing goes right at work, or an exam comes back with a higher grade than you expected...then, what effect from the victories of Jesus Christ? Who sets the tone? Who dictates the mood inside the Body of Christ, the church? Do you see why a guy might write a book called, "*Happy Church: Pursuing Radical Joy as the People of God*"? This is important business. The world doesn't get to dictate the spirit of the church. In here, we belong to Jesus.

In here, our spirit is the Holy Spirit, and with joy we rehearse the Kingdom, we celebrate the glory of the victories of Jesus. And it is precisely because of this that we can bring spirit to the dejected. It is precisely in our commitment and connectedness to this reality that we are able to bring a new spirit to those down-cast and oppressed and darkened and battered by the ever-shifting flocks of the spirit of the age. We have a different Spirit; a different resource to offer.

Now, Paul is continuing an argument from last week. Back in verse 6: "He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." (2 Corinthians 3:6) Here is a critical principle. What does it mean? Paul is talking about the Word of God here, the Bible, the Old Testament—but the same will come to apply to the New Testament. The principle is this: the Word of God does not travel alone, but like the sound of my voice is carried by my breath, the Spirit of God accompanies the Word of God. Without the Spirit, the Word kills. But with the Spirit the Word gives life. Paul refers to the only moment God actually put His own finger on written text, which is when Moses received the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai. Moses' face glowed from the presence of God, so Moses, out of concern that the presence of God would destroy the sinful people around him, wore a veil over his face so the shine of the glory of God would not damage the people he was shepherding. This resplendent glory is just from receiving the words, the letter. But Paul seems to say negative things about the letter. Verse 6, "the letter kills." Verse 7, it is a "ministry that brings death." Verse 9, "the ministry that brought condemnation." Does Paul hate the Bible?

It isn't that the letter does harm. The Bible shows us where we are with God, and once we see how holy God is and how far from holy we are, it breaks our hearts—and suddenly we are aware of the precariousness of our situation; that we are very truly on the edge of a great abyss, we are marching toward certain death if something doesn't change. Imagine—and this is terrible to imagine, but it comes from one of my favorite old movies "The Man from Snowy River." Imagine falling off a cliff in a storm at night, and you pass out in the dark in the middle of a storm and clouds and rain, and when you come to, you realize you're perched on a tiny ledge with no escape, up or down or left or right—you're doomed! Unless the Man from Snowy River comes to your rescue. The letter without the Spirit only shows you your situation, your precarious human condition. But then comes the Spirit.

Verses 7-10: "Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glo-

ry, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, transitory though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that brought condemnation was glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory." (2 Corinthians 3:7-10) Once the sun comes up, your flashlights and torches become useless. Once the sun rises, you know, you can't even tell if the campfire is burning or not. There is a surpassing light, a surpassing glory to the flames you once relied upon. Once the son of God has come, once Jesus has come and fulfilled the law of God, once Jesus has answered and completed all righteousness, once Jesus has taken our sins to the cross, once—as Paul later states in this same letter—"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21), once God has laid the wrong on Him who never did anything wrong so that in Him we could be put right with God, once all that happened...well, there is no glory to shine brighter than that.

So, there is a very real principle here I don't want you to miss. Paul goes on to explain in the next few verses that it is still possible to read the Bible and only get the condemnation. It is possible to read the Bible with a darkened mind, with a veil over your eyes just like Moses wore a veil over his face. But when the Spirit comes, the Word comes to life. When you read the Bible, read it as God's Word and call on Jesus to send the Holy Spirit to help you receive it. Until the Spirit of God opens your mind, it's just words on a page. Maybe you can remember the first time the Scriptures came to life for you, maybe even the verse or passage you were reading, when all of a sudden the words kind of lit up in your mind. And it wasn't a new insight; it wasn't a new level of appreciation for the Bible. It was that the dead letter became the living Word, and all of a sudden you were no longer reading the Bible, you were hearing from Jesus as He spoke His Word into your life. You were no longer reading for information, you were listening for a relationship. This is a universal experience for believers. J. I. Packer wrote of the work the Spirit, "To the apostles, he testified by *revealing* and *inspiring*, as we saw. To the rest of us, down the ages, he testifies by *illuminating*: opening blinded eyes, restoring spiritual vision, enabling sinners to see that the Gospel is indeed God's truth, and Scripture is indeed God's Word, and Christ is indeed God's Son." (*Knowing God*, p. 71) This is what it means to lift the veil. "But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away." (2 Corinthians 3:16) Does the Bible seem dead? Turn to the Lord.

But the larger theme is this: Paul is talking about a movement here. The people he writes, the church there in Corinth he loves dearly, they had been on a journey. First, they lived their lives as Corinthians. A free-for-all lifestyle, pursuing pleasure or meaning or success wherever it seemed to be found. Then they got a hold of God's Word—or God's Word got a hold on them. Suddenly they were aware, suddenly the lingering sense of dissatisfaction they experienced in common Corinthian life had some meaning. "Of course I'm not happy; of course I'm not at peace—I'm not at peace with God," they thought. And this letter kills, this truth crushes the spirit. They were dejected. But then came the joy of the gospel, the good news declared—Jesus has come, Jesus has won, and Jesus has sent His Spirit to dwell in you. And will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? Who dictates the mood now? Who dictates the spirit of the people now? "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." (2 Corinthians 3:17)

Because they were dejected they received spirit from God. Do you see? For this little community when they gathered, the mood was not dictated by the edicts of Rome, the tone was not governed by the rise of wealth in the markets, the culture was not defined by who won the game and who lost the game—the spirit of the world did not dictate the spirit of the church. And, because that was so, because that was true, verse 12: "Therefore, because we have such a hope, we are very bold." (2 Corinthians 3:12) Because our spirit is not the spirit of the world but the Spirit of the Living God, we can be a witness, a bold proclamation, a testimony that there is another Spirit at work than the spirit of the world. If all we have is our spirit, if all we have is our community spirit, our team spirit—then we really have nothing different to offer the world. But that's not the church. The church is met with a new spirit, the church is filled with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Living God abides with the church. Because of that we can be bold, we can be very bold, to say to those whose spirits are low, to those whose spirits are high, to those whose mood and satisfaction and meaning and happiness are based on the turning of tides and the shifting of winds, there is another Spirit. Maybe you haven't met Him. The Spirit of the Living Christ is here. The overcoming Spirit of God is here. The Holy Spirit is our Spirit. Turn, and lift the veil, and see.

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## STUDY GUIDE

### "Spirit to the Dejected"

#### 2 Corinthians 3:7-17

#### Start It

- Maybe your High School had a song or a cheer to raise team spirit. Remember that? There is a spirit when groups gather. Sociologists might suggest this is what church is all about—the comfort of commonality, the mood enhancing spirit of togetherness with a crowd. But the Bible suggests our mood, our common spirit, is not emerging out of our coming together but is actually dictated by the Holy Spirit among us.

#### Study It

- Read 2 Corinthians 3:7-11. What is the ministry that brings death? What does Paul mean when he says the law received by Moses is a ministry that brings death? This can be a challenging concept. You might want to refer to Galatians 3:10-29 where Paul works this idea out more fully. What does the knowledge of the law do to our souls?
- In verse 9 we read that the "ministry that brought condemnation" was glorious, but that there is now another even more glorious ministry. What is that more glorious ministry? What reasons does Paul give for why the second ministry is more glorious than the first?
- Read 2 Corinthians 3:12-17. What is this "veil"? Refer to Exodus 34:29-35. But in our text, there are two veils. What are the two veils?
- How are we to read and understand the Old Testament according to verse 14? What (who) has the power to remove the veil and give us understanding of the Scriptures?
- Finally, in verse 17 we read that the Spirit of the Lord is present. Who dictates the spirit of our church? How do you see this playing out in real life terms?

#### Pray It

*Lord, You do not leave us alone, but You sent Your Spirit to dwell with us. The spirit of the age is not our spirit—You alone, O Lord, are the Spirit that gives us life, the Spirit that shapes our church life, the Spirit that brings us to faith and carries us to salvation and life eternal. Glory to You, O God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

#### Live It

Consider where your mood comes from. Pay attention to what effects your mood this week. Seek to ground your emotional life on the presence of the Spirit of God.