

# SWIMMING AGAINST THE TIDE

## Being Holy in an Unholy World

***“On Your Mark, Get Set...Wait!”***

Luke 24:49

I heard about a preacher who stood up in front of a congregation of worshipers one Sunday morning and asked, ***“Have any of you here, at any time in your life—even in childhood—ever told an untruth? And, by the way, white lies count!”***

Of course, every hand in that auditorium was raised. Then he asked, ***“And has anyone here ever taken something that didn’t belong to you—like a piece of bubble-gum from a candy store or a paper clip from work or borrowed something which you never returned?”***

Once again, every hand in that auditorium was raised. ***“That’s good,”*** the minister said. ***“I just needed to know who my audience is this morning. I can see that I’m surrounded by a bunch of liars and thieves!”***

What a way to begin a message! But the truth of the matter is that as we gather together for worship this morning, I’m a recovering sinner speaking to a large group of recovering sinners. The Bible says, ***“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”*** (Romans 3:23 NIV).

In another place, it says, ***“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way”*** (Isaiah 53:6 NKJV). If you’re new here this morning, if this is your first time here, you may think you have come to a place where those who have gotten their lives all perfectly put-together gather.

I mean, look at us! We look so nice and neat and clean. We’re all dressed up. We have smiles on our faces. We’re so polite. We carry our Bibles. We give the appearance that all of our questions have been answered and that life is just “joy unspeakable and full of glory.”

But the fact of that matter is, I’m just a recovering sinner speaking to

a group of recovering sinners. Every one of us here this morning

-2-

wrestles with sin. We have difficulty with getting it right. We stumble. We fall. We make a real mess of things at times. The Bible describes us as ***“earthen vessels,” “jars of clay,” “cracked pots.”*** We are flawed and fragile and frail.

You will not find a more dedicated and devoted follower of Jesus Christ in all of history than the apostle **Paul**. He once said, ***“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him”*** (Philippians 3:10 NIV). On another occasion, he said, ***“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain”*** (Philippians 1:21 NIV).

He was the first and perhaps the greatest missionary in the Christian Church. He was a prolific church planter. He was a dynamic evangelist. He was a wise and gifted theologian. At least 13 books in the Bible were written by Paul.

And, yet, he too was a recovering sinner. In the **7<sup>th</sup> chapter** of the book of **Romans**, Paul describes in graphic terms his struggle with sin. He writes:

**I don’t understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I don’t do it. Instead, I do the very thing I hate...No matter which way I turn, I can’t make myself do right. I want to, but I can’t. When I want to do good, I don’t. And when I try not to do wrong, I do it anyway...I love God’s law with all my heart. But there is another law at work within me that is at war with my mind...Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin?**  
Romans 7:15, 18-19, 22-24 NLT

Now if the Scripture passage stopped right there—if that’s all Paul had to say about the subject—then we would have to leave this worship experience rather down and depressed, wouldn’t we? I mean, what encouragement is there in that for us? *Misery loves company?* That doesn’t really make us feel any better. That doesn’t answer the question. That doesn’t address this great need in our lives.

But, you see, Paul doesn’t stop with these words. The Scripture passage doesn’t end there. He cries out, ***“Who will free me from this life that is***

*dominated by sin?”* And then he answers his own question. He goes on

-3-

to say, ***“Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord”***  
(Romans 7:25 NLT).

That’s what I want to talk about this morning—**the power God gives us to live holy lives—lives that aren’t dominated or destroyed by sin.**

You may be sitting here this morning wondering, *“If I’m a recovering sinner—if I have all of these mixed motives, selfish ambitions and sinful tendencies—then how is it possible for me to live a life that is pleasing to God and spiritually enriching to others?”*

It all boils down to this matter of **power**, doesn’t it? Spiritual power! We must have power, some supernatural power, something outside of us, and above us, and something far greater than us that enables us to gain the victory. Power! We need power.

That young man, that young woman, who is trying to remain sexually pure in the midst of this sexually-obsessed society, who every day encounters a culture that says, ***“It’s all right. There’s nothing wrong with it. It’s normal. It’s natural. Everybody is doing it!”*** will never win the battle and be able to remain pure if they don’t have **power**. Spiritual power!

That young businessman who is trying to make it in a fiercely competitive market, in a “dog-eat-dog” world, where people trample all over one another to make it to the top, where they lie and steal and cheat and cut corners in order to be successful...that young man will never be able to keep his morals, his ethics, his convictions, his principles, his Christianity, unless he has **power**, spiritual power...a power that is above him and beyond him and yet somehow within him.

That man, that woman, who discovers that they have propensity for alcohol or pornography or tobacco or some addictive behavior, who find themselves in bondage, wrecking their health, destroying their homes, ruining their careers, will never find freedom, will never find

victory, will never overcome that addiction without **power**. Spiritual power!

-4-

It takes **power** to keep the body under control; the mouth clean and kind, the eye turned away from that which shouldn’t be gazed upon, the ear closed to that which is harmful and hurtful and destructive, the imagination free from that which is evil.

It takes **power** to keep sweet at home, to be tender to those closest to you; to be gracious and strong, patient and tender, cheery and uplifting, in the commonplace things of life; at home...in the unguarded moments in life...where you’re just you! It takes **power**. Real power!

It takes **power** to speak the truth when everyone around you is lying or falling prey to that which is deceptive and false. It takes **power** to be in the midst of a situation that is bitter and negative and nasty and yet remain loving and pleasant and gracious.

Power! Spiritual power! That’s the great need in our lives today. Some of you have been trying to turn over a new leaf in your life, haven’t you? You’ve been trying to make a new start. You’ve been trying to get your life turned around and headed in the right direction. Sometimes it seems the harder you try...the worse you fail. Right?

You need **power**—a supernatural power that is above and beyond what you possess within your own being, will, desire and determination.

Well, I have some great news to share with you this morning. It’s not new news. It’s old news. It’s as old as the Bible and yet it is as fresh and up-to-date and relevant as today. It is a truth that should encourage every one of us here this morning. **God understands your need for power and He has made a special provision for each of us to experience a power that is above and beyond our own natural capabilities.**

For every strong and subtle temptation; for every obstacle and enemy that confronts us; for every hurt and sorrow that pulls at us; for every injury and disappointment that wounds us; for every challenge and task that awaits us; God’s Word says, ***“You will receive power”*** (Acts 1:8 NIV).

God understands your need for power. Let me show you what I mean from God's Word. Please take your Bibles and turn to the book of

-5-

**Luke, the 24<sup>th</sup> chapter, verse 49.** Let me set the scene for you. Jesus is getting ready to leave this earth and ascend back into heaven and be seated at the right hand of His Father.

He had completed the work here on earth that the Father had sent Him to do. He had become one of us. He had shown us how to live a life full of grace and truth. He had taught us about the Father. He had gone to the cross and purchased our salvation. He who knew no sin had become a sin offering for us that we might have open access to the Father.

He had defeated sin, death and the Evil One...and had arisen from the grave proclaiming, ***"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live"*** (John 11:25 NKJV). But now His work was completed and He was returning to His Father in heaven.

But before He goes, He has some special words He wants to say to His disciples. He is leaving the work of His kingdom in their hands. He knows they are facing all kinds of uncertainties. He knows they are going to be hounded by the Roman officials and criticized by the Jewish believers and persecuted by the scribes and the Pharisees.

He knows that some of them are going to be thrown into prison and that all of them are going to become discouraged and disheartened at times. He knows that they are going to need a courage and a strength and wisdom much greater than what they possessed if they were going to be successful in carrying forth His mission.

They would need **power**, supernatural power, power above and beyond themselves. And so listen to what Jesus says to His disciples – **verse 49.** ***"I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high"*** (NIV). *Power from on high!*

What is He talking about? He is talking about power from God—the

power of God's Spirit in our lives. Being filled with the Holy Spirit of God!

-6-

In another place, in the opening chapter of the book of Acts, right before Jesus actually ascends back into heaven, He says, ***"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth"*** (Acts 1:8 NIV).

But before He says that, He says this: ***"Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John Baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit"*** (Acts 1:4-5 NIV).

When we think of Jesus' last words most of us focus upon those words He spoke in **Matthew 28:19** which know as the *Great Commission* when He said, ***"Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you"*** (Matthew 28:19-20 NIV).

That passage has become the heart of our mission here at the Ypsilanti Free Methodist Church – ***"Being Disciples Who Make Disciples."*** We are learners and followers of Jesus, we are students of His Word, we are teachable...and we want to help others become learners and followers of His Word, we want to help others becomes students of His was, we want to help others become teachable...servants of God.

But before Jesus ever said ***"Go"*** He said ***"Wait!"*** ***"Wait for the gift my Father promised."***

Can't you just imagine **Simon Peter's** impatience with Jesus? ***"Wait? Wait? Master, the world is dying! There's work to be done. We're ready to go. Don't we know enough already? Haven't we heard Your words? Haven't we experienced Your teaching? Haven't we observed what You did?"***

***"Yes, Peter, you have the knowledge but you don't have the power you are going to need to be victorious. You'll never make it. You'll never***

*succeed. You'll never be able to do what I've called you to do unless you have the power of God in your life."*

-7-

*"Yes, I need you to go. But, first, I need you to wait. Wait for the gift My Father promised."*

**On your mark! Get set! But...wait!**

So, what do you do while you're waiting? Do you remember what the disciples did as they waited in Jerusalem through the *Day of Pentecost*? They gathered together as Christian believers, they worshiped and fellowshiped together, and they prayed. The Bible says, *"When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together, in one place"* (Acts 2:1 NIV).

They were seeking God. They were waiting on Him. And it was in the midst of this experience that God fulfilled His promise and poured out His Holy Spirit upon these early believers, filled them with power and grace and wisdom...and the world has never again been the same.

*So I gather together with God's people, worship together, fellowship together, seek God and pray? Pray for what? How should I pray? Listen to what Jesus says to us. This is so important. He says, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it"* (Mark 8:34-35 NIV).

Do you hear, I mean really hear, what He is saying? Waiting on God includes 3 things.

**First, Surrendering Ourselves To God!** Emptying our hands of those things we cling to, those things that hold us, those things that have captured our hearts. Jesus said, *"First, you must deny yourself."* You must surrender yourself, everything you have, everything you are, to God.

You future, your plans, your desires, your resources, your home, your

relationships, your work, your life, to God!

**Second, Choosing To Submit Our Wills To The Father's Will.**

Listen to what Jesus says. *I must take up my cross and follow Him.*

-8-

I hear people talk about carrying crosses all of the time. Not long ago a person commented to me about their shyness and said, *"It's just my cross in life."* We often refer to unpleasant realities in our lives as our "crosses" to bear. But that is not what Jesus meant when He said, *"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."*

The cross Jesus refers to is a voluntary cross—something we choose to endure. People don't choose to be shy. They just are. They're born with that bent or that predisposition. That's not a cross. Nor are most of the other unpleasant realities in life which we often refer to as our "*cross*" really crosses in the sense that Jesus meant it.

I've heard people say, *"Well, I just can't carry a tune in bucket. That's my cross."* No...those things have been forced upon us, so to speak. We have had no real choice in the matter.

They may be crosses but they are certainly not the cross to which Jesus refers. To *"pick up the cross daily,"* as Jesus meant it, is to acknowledge every day that we belong to God and that we are going to live our lives according to His word and His will and His way.

*"God, it's not what I want; it's what You want. God, it's not my way; it's Your way. God, it's not what I think; it's what You think."*

**Third, Waiting Includes Truly Following Jesus – Walking With Him Every Day.** Jesus says, *"He must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."*

Being filled with God's Spirit is not just one momentous, instantaneous experience that happens and is completed and you drive a marker beside it and say, *"There! I was filled with God's Spirit on that day."* And you make it into some kind of holy shrine.

The Bible says in **Ephesians 5:18**, *"Be filled with the Spirit"* (NIV) But

the Greek word that is used there means something like this: *“Be filled and filled and filled and continue to be filled with the Holy Spirit.”* It’s not a once in a life time experience. It’s not something that happens and

-9-

then you’re done with it. It’s not something that occurred in the best but rather it is something that is supposed to continue in the present. *Be filled and filled and filled and continue to be filled with God’s Spirit!*

The disciples were filled with God’s Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, filled with God’s power, and they did some incredible things. But if you will read on in the book of Acts, you will find other occasions when it says they were filled with the Holy Spirit again.

Part of the “waiting” on Jesus is surrendering to Him, emptying our hands of our stuff, submitting to His will and choosing to follow Him afresh and anew each day.

And so I plead with you this morning to **wait** on Jesus until you are clothed with power from on high. **Wait** until your will is perfectly aligned with His will. **Wait** until you have emptied your hands of those things that are holding you back from completely following God.

**Wait** until your eyesight is corrected and your will surrendered.

Someone has put it like this.

**My hands were filled with many things  
That I did precious hold,  
As any treasure of a king’s—  
Silver, or gems, or gold.  
The Master came and *touched* my hands,  
(The scars were in His own)  
And at His feet my treasures sweet  
Fell shattered, one by one.  
“I must have empty hands,” said He,  
“Wherewith to work my works through thee.”**

**My hands were stained with marks of toil,  
Defiled with dust of earth;  
And I my work did oft times soil,  
And render little worth.**

-10-

**The Master came and *touched* my hands,  
(And crimson were His own)  
But when, amazed, on mine I gazed,  
Lo! Every stain was gone.  
“I must have cleansed hands,” said He,  
“Wherewith to work My works through thee.”**

**My hands were growing feverish  
And cumbered with much care!  
Trembling with haste and eagerness,  
Nor folded often in prayer.  
The Master came and *touched* my hands,  
(With healing in His own)  
And calm and still to do His will  
They grew—the fever gone.  
“I must have quiet hands,” said He,  
“Wherewith to work My works for Me.”**

**My hands were strong in fancied strength,  
But not in power divine.  
And bold to take up tasks at length,  
That were not His but mine.  
The Master came and *touched* my hands,  
(And might was in His own!)  
But mine since then have powerless been,  
*Save His are laid thereon.*  
“And it is only thus,” said He,  
“That I can work My works through thee.”**

