

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

May 16, 2021

Stirred: Evidence of Righteousness

Joshua Symonette

If you are listening to this message this weekend and I don't know you're working out, folding clothes, driving, whatever it is, and you have not seen this trailer, you owe it to yourself to check out this trailer. Now, not just because my daughter is dancing in the trailer, that's great but just the beauty of the movements of the dancers and just the artistry, all of it is so moving. And for me it's like a parabolic picture of sorts of I believe how God desires for his Spirit to move inside and outside of us. We do get these stirrings from time to time and it causes certain movements within us. It's kind of like physics, something kinetic happens and then there is some sort of reaction of sorts. But sometimes it doesn't come together as choreographed and as beautiful, as some of us saw in this trailer. And sometimes number one, when we're stirred, it doesn't feel as good as music, right? Or does it maybe move us like a piece of art that we've seen? And then secondly, our reaction or our movement isn't always maybe what it should be. It isn't always as pretty or what it could be.

So this weekend, if you have a Bible, I'd love for you to meet me in Galatians chapter number five. And that's where I want to focus this weekend as we continue this series, entitled Stirred, which is generally about you know, God's movement, God's Spirit, within and among us. But what do you do when the stirring doesn't feel good? Or what about when you feel provoked, or someone says something you didn't like? Maybe you were mischaracterized or maybe you were tempted, hey, where I'm from, they say they tried me. Maybe you felt tried or whatever it is, you fill in the blank And I'm thinking about this regarding this message this weekend, because of all of the things that I've been seeing lately. And I won't even say, feeling I'm seeing a lot of stirring, I'm sure you're seeing a lot of stirring as well. Folks feeling stirred, and I'm looking at reactions to the stirring that are sometimes unhelpful and to the extreme, even volatile.

It reminds me of this artist, beautifully talented, her name is Jazmine Sullivan, she's got an amazing voice. And she has this song titled Bust your Windows. Matter of fact, it's her most downloaded song. And this song is about her relationship with a man and she says, "I bust the windows out of your car but it didn't mend my broken heart." And so she's talking about how she was stirred in a not so good way and her reaction to that stirring. Now, maybe we're not busting windows out of people's cars, hopefully we're not. But this is indicative of kind of how we're stirred emotionally when it comes to our interactions, particularly with one another. And sometimes those reactions are not good. And maybe we're not reacting like Jazmine is talking about in this song, but we are doing damage to one another with our words and how we treat one another or maybe how we're leaving things undone and unresolved.

Paul, the apostle, who is the writer of the majority of the New Testament, he understood this very well. He understood that when we're stirred in our flesh, and we mix it with these human interactions that we're having that it becomes very critical in terms of how we interact with one another. And this is why he spends the majority of the New Testament writings, he's talking about living like Christ, being a Jesus follower, what does that mean, in addition to dealing with other people, dealing with the tensions and the culture around them at the same time. That's why I love this letter that Paul has written to Christians in Galicia. Because, you know, it's kind of one of those encouragement letters, you know, they've gotten off track a little bit. And so Paul is writing to them to kind of help get them back on course, because there's been so much focus on things like ceremonial rituals and the cleanliness aspect of how they're supposed to live and the Judaic law. And circumcision was a constant focus of justification.

And so Paul opens this letter, and he says, I'm amazed, not at how well you're doing, but how you've gotten off track. It's like a different gospel, as a matter of fact, is not the gospel at all. Don't you feel that way? Those of us who are Jesus followers that maybe we've kind of gotten off track, and some of the things that we're seeing, and the reaction is not the gospel at all. There was confusion, there was accusations back and forth, there was this drama, and it was both cultural, and religious. It was all wrapped up together. Sound familiar?

So, let's zoom in on Galatians five, and before we get to verse 16 that's what we're going to start. Before we get there let me just give you just a little appetizer, just a little, a little context all right. So, Paul opens by saying, "*I say, then, walk by the Spirit.*" All right. So, before we put the words up on the screen, let me just let me just unpack this. He said, "*So then*", or "*I say, then walk by the Spirit.*" He's saying that for reason. He's saying walk by the Spirit in it, like, contrary to what y'all got going on right now. But before that, the reason he's saying this is you back up in verse 14, he's talking about the law, okay? And he says listen and all of this talk about you know, cleanliness and following the law and all this, listen, Jesus summarized this for us. As a matter of fact, in Mark 12 Jesus summarize it and he was asked what is the greatest commandment? And then Paul just echoes it. And he says, "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*" That's it. Like all of this... So it's just that simple. Because they will focus on a righteousness that was no longer valid. It was based on tradition. It was based on history. It was based on rituals. And as a matter of fact, it was actually weighing on people, particularly the Gentiles. Paul said, "We've been freed in Christ. He's already done the work." And this is what in Acts 15, the Jerusalem Council was all about. This is a significant reference point that I offer you to go back and read. But this whole thing about well, what does it mean to follow Jesus if I'm not Jewish, this was answered, but yet Paul is still dealing with this in Galatians.

So then you skip over the verse, or go to verse 15. He says, just very simply, if y'all keep this up, it kind of sound like my mom back in the day, you keep it up here. This is basically him sayin' if y'all keep this up, all right, you will devour and consume one another. And he said, "Hey, listen, if you follow Jesus, I mean, it's a waste of energy. It's a waste of time."

So then, we pick up in verse 16, he says, *“I say, then, walk by the Spirit and you will certainly not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is against the Spirit, and the Spirit desires what is against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you don't do what you want.”*

Skip down to verse 19. *“Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, (some translations say orgies) and anything similar. I'm warning you about these things – as I warned you before - that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”* That reference there is about the benefits of being a part of God's kingdom. He closes out by saying, *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The law is not against such things.”*

This weekend, I want to just tag this message with a simple title, The Evidence of Righteousness. The Evidence of Righteousness. The main point here that Paul is addressing is this beef back and forth about righteousness. And he says, the fruit of the Spirit is the evidence of righteousness. So that means one thing for us this weekend and one thing only. So this is my only point, if you're taking notes, you can write this down. Our hope for righteousness is God's Spirit. Our hope for righteousness is God's Spirit. We're going to unpack that for just a minute. Matter of fact, at the beginning of chapter five, in Galatians, Paul says this very thing. So, I just borrowed this from Paul. He says, *“For the hope of righteousness is by the Spirit.”* Which means you can't accomplish it any other way. You can't accomplish it through your practical efforts through the flesh. So, let's stop all of the ceremonial stuff that we're hanging over people's heads, this box checking. Hey, I'm a part of this, I joined this group; this shows that I'm righteous. All of this arguing back and forth it's a dead mission.

And I love the way theologian N. T. Wright puts this metaphorically, he was talking about a city somewhere in a very, very cold place where there's a lake and the lake freezes over at a certain part of the year, and you can drive across the lake to the other side. And he said at a certain point, obviously, the ice will begin to melt and it's no longer safe and then it's just completely water and there's only one way across and it's by ferry. And so if you're trying to get across the same way, there's only two options you stand there at the bank and wait to see what's going to happen which is nothing or you try to drive which we know is going to lead to drowning.

Then I think about the great choir director, Ricky Dillard and his song that says, “There is no other way”. That's it. That's the title of the song ‘There is No Other Way’. I tried it over and over and over, there is no other way. Both N.T. Wright and Ricky Dillon saying the same thing.

If we look at verse 16, let me just unpack these things for just a few moments Paul says, *“I say, then, walk by the Spirit and you will certainly not carry out the desire of the flesh.* That word desire in the Greek means lust. And there are two other references that I want to highlight for you that I think really illuminates Paul's point. In Mark four that same word is talking about how desire chokes us to the point

of unfaithfulness. Think about that for a second, our lust of the flesh, it literally chokes out our ability to be fruitful. And then in Romans 6:12 is in reference to sin, reining in our lives. And sin just means we're on a divergent path than the path God desires for us and that's reining in our lives all right, but not if we walk by the Spirit. It's kind of like guardrails or those ridges on the road and let you know like you kind of going over look too far. And then Paul, if you just go through his letters, he's repetitive about this same thing. It's not just Galatia, it's Rome, it's Ephesus, it's Philippi, it's the Colossians as well.

And so, let's break it down real quick. Just chapter number five, so, he says in verse one, *"You are free in Christ."* That's that first and foremost, you are free in Christ. Then in verse five, he says, *"By his Spirit, we hope."* Then, in verse 17, he says, "Not so you can do what you want." You're free in Christ. All right, by his Spirit, we hope but not so you can do what you want. Then he goes to verse 22, it says, *"But for you to reflect righteousness."* He lists the fruits of the Spirit. And then verse 26, he says, *"And not so you can be self-righteous, or conceited."* Let's not get too high minded here.

Let me just go back to how I opened this message. And the reason I want to park right here for a few moments this weekend, is because of what I was saying earlier, I'm seeing a lot of stirring, we got a lot of stuff going on in this season. I mean, obviously, you know, we have this pandemic, that's happening COVID-19. You know, it's just like this hovering cloud. And, by the way, I do want to mention that we have a group at NCC, for people who are trying to figure out how do we come out of this. And it's how to thrive coming out of COVID-19. You can find it at ncc.rv/groups. I just wanted to throw that out there because that's a real thing. We're all dealing with this and in some sort of way. But I'm personally frustrated by some of the things that I'm seeing as a Jesus follower. I'm frustrated with some of the things I'm seeing from Jesus folks, his people. And when I read Galatians, I immediately connect to Paul's frustration. In the beginning of Galatians five, Paul, what happened to y'all? Y'all was running so good. Well, wait, wait, you know what, this is what I heard from us. You know, I thought we were further alone then this. What happened, who hindered you is what Paul said. And he's addressing how Christians were being stirred in the wrong way. Because listen, every stirring, every prompting is not this beautiful Holy Spirit moment. I wish that was the case. But here's the thing, if we are a Jesus follower, then the litmus test for our reaction our response is the fruit of the Spirit. That's the litmus test.

If we hit the rewind button back to Genesis three, this was the fall of man. So, Eve, she encounters the serpent and he was presented with this false reality that was veiled in the truth. And the lie was, God is holding back. He knows that if you eat this fruit, that your eyes will be open. Now, that was only partially true. God was not holding back his provision. He had given everything. He had provided everything. What he was doing was protecting. But here's the thing, man shows selfish ambition.

Paul said that that's one of the works of the flesh. And I want to highlight that this weekend, because I think selfish ambition is one of the acts of the flesh that we're okay with. We're okay with that. We celebrate that. We're clapping, hey, you got to do you, man. You got to do you, girl. You go ahead. yeah, pursue that thing. And it's not that the pursuit is bad but what is the motivation behind the pursuit?

Now sexual immorality, witchcraft, drunkenness, orgies that's really bad? We yeah, we put that over here. That stuff is whooo, we don't want to mess it. Now, some of this other stuff, you know, kind of sort of maybe depends on the situation. But selfish ambition, though, listen to what James said, "*Where you have selfish ambition you see every evil practice.*" That's what he said. And what he's saying is not that it's like if you're selfishly ambitious that like every evil practices, is he saying no, when you see evil practices is tethered to selfish ambition. Somewhere along the way, is what he's saying. That's why Paul says in verse nine of Galatians, five, he says, a little leaven, like goes through the whole yeast, and it makes it rise. Because he knew that those who were Jews would understand this reference. That's why when, during the Passover, yeast is not even allowed in the kitchen. We're not even gonna give it potential to rise, we're removing it completely.

So, here's the thing. Paul says, "*The evidence of righteousness is not circumcision.*" It's not these acts is not these rituals. It's not these things. But it's the fruit of the Spirit. And this is the filter and the evidence of God's Spirit at work in us.

Let me just highlight one other point that I wanted to make. This was not just about a circumcision issue. Okay. It was it was more than that. It was also a Jew, Gentile issue that was deep and significant. And this is the reason why I believe it's important for us in this day, right now to talk about the ethnic and the cultural tensions, a lot of times surrounding race, I think it's important for us to elevate those things and talk about it, because it's a central issue in the Bible, throughout the Bible, particularly in the Pauline letters. So, when people say, just preach the scriptures, I'm like, yo it's in, it's in there. And not only is it in there, the correlation between what was happening then, to what is happening now is very similar. And it gives us both historical and a theological point of reference for how to deal with it. And Paul clearly understands this cultural divide in addition to the theological divide, he definitely didn't understand this because he is a Jew talking to Gentiles. So, he's speaking to both aspects of how this thing is playing out. And he's like, cow don't fall for the okey doke. Don't do it. Don't, don't, don't go down that road.

I love what Pastor Mark said in the first week of this series, when he kicked off and he said, "Stirred is rising above the rhetoric." Okay, and the rhetoric is related to these racial, cultural, political tensions that just kind of seem to keep swirling. Stirring is rising above the rhetoric and living according to Biblical conviction. So, God's Spirit at work, all right is both an activator, okay, it's movement, all right and it's also an anchor at the same time. It's an activator and it's an anchor because listen, we need movement, but we need to be steady. So, it's both. It's not just the promptings, but the practical cultivating of God's Spirit in our lives that's what propels us forward. So, it's obeying the promptings of the Holy Spirit plus living in the power of the Holy Spirit. We need both. We need both. And the Fruits of the Spirit cannot be lived out without the Holy Spirit. Like, this is not some like genetically modified thing you can do. You know, I know like, you can kind of like get fruits and veggies and all this, I don't fully understand it with genetically, but you can't do that with the Holy Spirit. It just ain't gonna work. You can't do it.

So, our hope for righteousness is God's Spirit at work within us. There's this old song. Oh, and I don't know why I do this. I just want to always come up with these song references. It's just where my mind goes. "If it had not been for the Lord, who was on my side, where would I be?" Now listen, I might not know where I would be, but I know what I might do. I got some ideas of how I might react and respond to some things. I don't know where it will lead me, but I know, I got an idea of what I would do.

Now remember, this idea of righteousness and this is an important point. It's not just about being right and holy. When we look at it from the Old Testament standpoint, and the Hebrew aspect of this justice and righteousness was a package deal. And it was about restoring brokenness and right relationships at the same time. So, and the reason this is important, is because what God's Spirit at work within us, is us in partnership with God doing his redemptive work here on Earth. Wow, okay, that ne'er one of us does that – that's what they would say where I'm from. None of us can do that in our own power. It just won't happen.

Let me see if I can land a plane for us like this, the Fruits of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These are not easy to produce, we can't do this in our own power. And I want to just ask you to consider this as we're in this series and we're talking about the Holy Spirit. Now this week, we're talking about the evidence of righteousness is the fruits of the Spirit. When stuff happens and you feel stirred, look in the mirror, do some self-evaluating and see what fruits are being produced. Just see, see what... Now I'm not saying; listen you're human, you might get frustrated, you might get upset, yeah, there's nothing wrong with those things but what do you do after that? Is that was driving? Do a litmus test.

I had a recent situation, very, very recent, I'm still kind of dealing with it. A situation with a neighbor, in my community, and I won't go into details, but it really bothered me, y'all. I got this email from someone that's on the board in our neighborhood, while I was trying to enjoy myself out of town, that's what I get for opening my email. Um, but I was really bothered by this. And I was so frustrated by this issue because it just didn't make sense to me. And so, I told my wife what I really wanted to do. Like, I can't repeat some of this stuff. Like it was very mean, you know, it was very vengeful. Listen, I know I'm a pastor but I still I'm human too, you know. But I was like this, you know, this is just how I feel. And I don't always get it right, I acknowledge that. But when I got home, I got dressed up, you know, put on some nice clothes, went to go see the neighbor, knowing full well, that it was probably not going to be resolved. And guess what, it's just easier for me to respond how I want it or just to avoid it altogether because that's what the flesh wants to do. But in verse 17, of Galatians five, Paul says that the flesh and God's Spirit don't have the same agenda. So, it's the Spirit that prompts and propels us in his power. So, I had to pray as I'm walking over there in his power, Lord, helped me to be kind. Help me to be gentle because this is not how I want to react. You know this is foolishness. You know, you got to talk to God like that sometimes. Like just read Psalms and just see how David, would be like, "God, you better kill him." I wasn't saying that.

Pastor Mark also said this in week one, “Stirred is taking our cues from Scripture. So that means if there's an issue between your brother or your sister, they wronged you, or any of those sorts, you go to them. It's Matthew 18, Paul says twice, Ephesians four and Romans 12, “You do everything in your power to keep the peace, to keep the unity.” Like if it's up to you, and it's in your power to do it. But the flesh prioritizes convenience and comfort because it's self-gratifying. It's easier to cancel people, to leave, to blame, to avoid if we disagree. It's just easier to do that. But the evidence of righteousness is the Fruit of the Spirit, how we respond the way we don't really want to respond. And there's nothing comfortable about that. But if we live by the Spirit, we're not under the flesh's just control.

So, to those who say they follow Jesus, that's the challenge we got to accept. Paul says, *“If we live by the Spirit, then let us also keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.”* And to those who want to be free from the burden of performing, from the burden of working to justify your righteousness. It's like the people that Paul was writing to who are going in circles because they're trying to do this thing over here and they're trying to do this thing over here and Paul is like, no, you're free in Christ. If you want that freedom, we want to invite you to accept that freedom in Christ that's freely offered, all you got to do is accept it. And when you accept it, then you are also - it's like a package deal you get the Holy Spirit that then empowers you to help you live out the scriptures because this is some challenging stuff. But the litmus test for those who are believers, it's the Fruit of the Spirit in our lives, and how we engage with one another.

Let's pray God, we thank you so much for who you are. God, we're all stirred in a bunch of different ways. But God help us to take a moment to self-evaluate where we are. Because I know the ways in which I'm stirred at times that need a lot more of the Holy Spirit's work I'm aware of that. God help us to become more aware of those areas, but also more aware of your presence. And God, let our love for you be so deep, that we are compelled to go to our brother, to go to our sister, to run to the fire and not away from it. Not in our own power, not in our own strength, but by your Spirit, says the Lord. In Jesus name. Amen.