

“With the Cloud of the Lord” (Exodus 14:19-20)

We’ve been in the series of “The Tree of Life” studying the Pentateuch. Today is the 5th message.

Last week, we looked at incidents related to Water. “The flood and Noah’s Ark,” “the Red Sea and the Egyptian Army,” and “The Nile River and Moses’ new life.” Today the theme is “cloud.” In the first five books of the Bible, “clouds” as well as “water” had a very important role. This morning I’ll talk about cloud, cover, guide, separation, refuge, and presence. This will be the outline for today.

1. Cloud

Do you know when “cloud” first appears in the Bible? In chapter one of Genesis, in the account of creation of the heaven and the earth? I’m afraid it’s not. The answer is it’s after the flood in Noah’s time. God spoke to Noah, “Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. I’ve set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth” (Gen 9:13). When the rainbow appears in the clouds, it is showing us that God remembers his covenant.

Then after that? After that, it appears in Exodus. You know now, right? No? That’s all right. Let’s look at the Bible.

Exodus 13:21-22

By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.

This is the scene right after the Passover. The Israelites are slaves in Egypt. God chose Moses to save the Israelites, and sent him to Pharaoh. But Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites go. God said to Moses, “Every household is to take a lamb, and slaughter it. Then take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the door-frames of each of your houses. And stay inside your house.”

At midnight, God sent his angels and struck down all the firstborn in Egypt. There was not a house without someone dead. But God passed over the houses with the blood, so the Israelites were spared. That’s why this is called “the Passover.”

Egyptians urged the Israelites to hurry and leave the country or otherwise they thought they would all die. It seems there were about 2 million

Israelites, but all of them hurriedly took got their things together and left Egypt, heading toward the wilderness.

And as we read earlier, “the Lord went ahead of them and guided them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night.” Okay, now “cloud” appeared, right? Remember this and let’s move on.

But after the Israelites left, Pharaoh again changes his mind. “What have we done? It was a mistake to let them go. Let’s bring them back!” Pharaoh pursued the Israelites with his army.

The Israelites were camping by the Red Sea. Then the Egyptian Army was about to overtake them. They had the Red Sea in front, and the Egyptian Army behind. They got into a desperate situation with no escape.

The Israelites were terrified and cried out, “Did God bring us out of Egypt to the desert to die? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!”

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Tell the Israelites to move on. Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground.”

When Moses did as the Lord instructed him, the Lord drove the sea back with a strong wind and divided the water. And the Israelites went through the sea on the dry ground. A happy ending!

Wait a minute! Aren’t you forgetting something? Uhh...what is it? What about the Egyptian army? They were pursuing the Israelites from behind. What do you think they were doing *until* the water was divided by the strong wind all night long and there was a dry ground in the midst of the sea? Why didn’t they come near the Israelites and attack them?

Right after the Lord had spoken to Moses, there was this incident.

Exodus 14:19-20

Then the angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel’s army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them, coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side; so neither went near the other all night long.

Yes, it was because of the “cloud.” The pillar of cloud had been traveling in front of the Israelites up to that point, now it withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud stood between the armies of Egypt and Israel, preventing them from coming near Israel.

2. Cover

At first, the pillar of cloud went in front of Israel, but it withdrew and went behind them.

Have you ever passed through clouds when you were in an airplane? Up to that point, we were flying over the clouds, and I had an unobstructed view. Then I imagined myself walking on the clouds, climbing up here and coming down there. I wonder if you imagine that too?

But when we come closer to our destination, the plane starts descending. We plunge into the clouds and now we can't see anything but clouds. Outside the window, we see the clouds flying at a tremendous speed. Sometimes we experience quite a shake. After a little while, we come out under the clouds, and start to see a city below.

I want you to imagine. The pillar of cloud in front of the Israelites gradually moved and went past them, and finally it went behind them. In case of an airplane, it is the airplane that moves, not the clouds. In case of Israel, it was the cloud that moved, not the Israelites. But the experience of going through the clouds is the same.

Once they plunged into the clouds, and then they came out. Once their whole bodies were covered by the cloud. They were all baptized in the cloud (1 Cor 10:2).

The cloud is the sign of God's presence, and manifestation of God's glory (Ex 16:10, 24:16, 40:34-35). Israelites experienced being totally covered and enclosed by the cloud. For us who live in the time of the New Testament, this reminds of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit.

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? (1 Cor 6:19)" And, Paul says, "We are the temple of the living God," and quoting from Exodus and Leviticus, he says, "I [God] will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." (2 Cor 6:16; Ex 29:45; Lev 26:12)

When a person is born again, they become a Christian, receiving Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. Because God is One, they receive God the Father and God the Holy Spirit as well as God the Son, Jesus Christ. When a person believes in Jesus and is born again, the Holy Spirit comes and starts to live in the person. Every Christian has the Holy Spirit inside (Rom 8:9).

To Christians in Ephesus, Paul argues, "Be filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18)." Before this, he declares that having believed in the Gospel, they were marked in Christ with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13). So, there is no

doubt that they had the Holy Spirit in them. And, to them, he argues, “Be filled with the Spirit.”

Why? The answer is very simple. Because to receive Jesus, to receive the Holy Spirit when you were saved, and to be filled with the Holy Spirit, to be baptized in the Holy Spirit are two different things.

3. Guide

This pillar of cloud appeared to the Israelite when they left Egypt. And it led them out of Egypt, the land of slavery.

The Holy Spirit comes and works in us even while we are still in the life of sin. He will show us God’s righteousness, make us realize our sin and God’s eternal judgement (John 16:8). He will lead us to Christ, who is the truth and the life, and makes us start a journey to the eternal life (John 16:13).

You cannot be a Christian, by merely coming to church on Sundays, attending meetings and reading the Bible at home. You will be a Christian, a citizen of the kingdom of God by being born again by the work of the Holy Spirit (John 3:5).

When you believe in Jesus, repent and receive the water baptism, you will not graduate from Christian life. That is completely opposite. You will start a new life. That is the beginning of the life of a citizen of the kingdom of God.

Whether your Christian life will end up mere religious routine, or whether you will experience Jesus, grow and bear fruit as Christians, the key is the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is not a mere doctrine. He is not a past gift. The Holy Spirit is God, the third Person of the Trinity, who is still living and working actively.

It is important to understand the Holy Spirit theoretically. However, it is another thing to have living relationship with the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, you can have living relationship with the Holy Spirit without understanding all. But as Christians, we still need to understand the Word of God correctly. Otherwise, we must follow a wrong spirit. The Holy Spirit is our guide.

When the Israelites saw the pillar of cloud for the first time, they must have been perplexed. They wouldn’t have been able to understand what it was clearly.

But when they started to follow the pillar of cloud, they gradually began to understand that it was the presence of God. Israel lived with the pillar of cloud. When the cloud moved forward, they also moved forward. When the cloud stopped, they also stopped. They never left the pillar of cloud.

During their forty years in the desert, the pillar of cloud stopped when they were to rest, and it started to move when they were to move. The pillar of cloud

separated them from their enemy, and sometimes it covered them like a great tent above them to protect them from scorching sunlight in the desert.

These were supernatural incidents. They were protected and led by the supernatural presence of God. Yet this is also true of the life of a Christian who is led by the Holy Spirit and lives in His presence

So the Bible encourages us:

“If we are living now by the Holy Spirit, let us follow the Holy Spirit’s leading in every part of our lives. (Gal 5:25 NLT)”

4. Separation

The Egyptian Army was pursuing the Israelites. But because of the pillar of cloud between them, they couldn’t come near the Israelites. The cloud completely separated them from the Egyptian Army.

The cloud came between them and the enemy, protected them from their enemy, and prevented their enemy from catching up with them. The Holy Spirit will come between God’s people and sin, fear and temptation. He will spread his wings to cover his people under them.

We cannot make ourselves holy, no matter how hard we try. Though we were washed, sanctified, and justified, we cannot keep ourselves sanctification by our own effort. So the Father promised us that we’d be baptized in the Holy Spirit. Jesus will baptize us in the Holy Spirit. He will totally soak us into the Holy Spirit.

A person who was baptized in the Holy Spirit lives a new life, which reflects the nature and the work of the Holy Spirit.

What kind of spirit is the Holy Spirit? It is literally “holy” spirit. A person who has been soaked into the “Holy” Spirit lives in holiness. “Holiness” is the most powerful witness for Christ to the world, the proof of the power of the Gospel, the hope of salvation.

In other words, a witness for Christ, the message of the Gospel, the hope of salvation without holiness, or the reflection of God's character do not have the power to lead sinners to Christ.

Baptism in the Holy Spirit is the power that makes every Christian “a witness for Christ to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

5. Refuge

Throughout their journey, when the pillar of cloud lifted and moved, it was

the time for the Israelites to set out. When the cloud settled, it was the time for them to encamp and rest. It covered them from above and protected them from scorching sunlight (Num 9:15-23).

The Holy Spirit leads us, sometimes to prayer, other times to ministry, and still other times to perseverance, to a new experience, to a new responsibility, and to a new territory.

And in the midst of the busy work schedule, in a fierce battle, the Holy Spirit also covers us with his wings and gives us rest, gives us time to quiet ourselves, and leads us into even deeper relationship with Him.

Isaiah 58:11

The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.

Do you have a feeling that you are crossing through a sun-scorched land? Dose any of you need strength to live in a dry land? Do you like to live an abundant life like a well-watered garden, not like a ruin? Do you want to have a spring inside of you whose waters never fail while you are in wilderness?

John 7:37-39

Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him. By this he meant the Spirit."

Jesus is inviting you to come to him and receive the living water, the Holy Spirit. He will give you the living water, not just a mouthful. No. He will fill you with the living water, he will baptize you by the Spirit.

Jesus wants you to be soaked in the Holy Spirit. Not just a part, not just on the surface, but He wants the Holy Spirit to completely soak through you.

John 15:5

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

We should continue to remain in Jesus. And we need to have Jesus remain in us. Otherwise, we will soon be withered.

Baptism in the Holy Spirit means, Jesus has soaked through you. Not just when you are doing specific things nor just when you are in particular places, but whatever you do, wherever you are, Jesus is your life. He'll comfort you, heal you, strengthen you, and overflow from you as streams of living water. That is the

power of Baptism in the Holy Spirit.

6. Presence

The people of Israel could see that the cloud covered the whole Tent of Meeting (Ex 40:34-38; Num 9:15-23). This is different from the time when the cloud first appeared at the Mt. Sinai. They were not allowed to come close to it. Whoever touch the mountain is to be put to death, except Moses who was called to come by God (Ex 19:12, 20).

But now the Lord made them His dwelling, He stayed among them, and filled them. The cloud showed it. They were baptized in the cloud. Throughout their lives, the glory of God was with them.

I want you to pay attention to one thing. The pillar of cloud disappeared when they entered the Promised land. It doesn't mean that the Presence of the Lord left them. The Holy Spirit was still with them by their faith, not by sight.

When we have the experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit, at first we can't understand it very well, so God gives us some signs so that we would know that it's the Holy Spirit. But there will be fewer and fewer signs as time goes on. It is because as time passes, we deepen our relationship with the Holy Spirit, whom we can't see. And the depth of our relationship with Him will manifest as the Presence of God and it will be expressed sometimes as the fruit of the Spirit, and other times as spiritual gifts. But often it will be manifested as the pleasing aroma of Christ.

2 Cor 2:15 NRVS

For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing;

We cannot see the aroma, nor touch the aroma. But it is surely there. We cannot hide it even if we try. Every time we move, the aroma will naturally spread there.

For example, when you put a hard-dry sponge into water, the water will gradually soak through the sponge. Eventually the water will be all over the sponge. Now the sponge is in the water, and the water is in the sponge. And, imagine, you put the sponge into the most precious perfume. Wherever you put the sponge, the beautiful aroma just spreads. You can't hide it.

Baptism in the Holy Spirit is not that a Christian is affected by the Holy Spirit a little bit, but it is the state that the Holy Spirit has soaked through the Christian. It is the state that a dry and withered heart is now "moistened, wet" by

the Holy Spirit, not only that but “streams of living water” will flow from within it; a hardened heart is now freed by the Holy Spirit; a harsh and hostile heart is now full of thanksgiving and joy by the Holy Spirit. Not just when you are doing specific things nor just when you are in particular places, but whatever you do, wherever you are in, the fragrance of Jesus will naturally come out from within you. You can’t hide it. That is the power of Baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Are you longing to be filled with the Holy Spirit today? I am not asking you what kind of church programs and activities you are taking part in and what’s happening there. Are you longing to be filled with the Holy Spirit today? Do you feel you are crossing through a sun-scorched land, and want to have a spring of living water? If you are not filled continuously, you will lose the presence of God. You will lose peace and joy of salvation. You will forget God’s purpose of sending you to the world, and you won’t be able to accomplish the mission God has given you as one redeemed through the life of Jesus. We, Christians always need to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

For self-reflection

1. The works of the Holy Spirit are described in five ways: cover, guide, separation, refuge, and presence. Can you recognize these works in your life? How has the Holy Spirit been ministering to you through these five ways?
2. In these five ways, which one is most active in your current life? Which one do you need more?