

**THE HOLY SPIRIT IS A SEAL AND A DEPOSIT.
EPHESIANS 1:11-14; 2 CORINTHIANS 1:21-22**

Years ago a bridge was built over a great river in one of our western states. It was decided as a publicity stunt that once it officially opened to the public, a \$1,000 prize would be given to the occupants of the 100th car to drive across the new bridge. A little crowd had gathered and excitement was high. At last, the car that would be number 100 to cross the bridge was seen off in the distance. The crowd began to cheer as the car approached the bridge. Just then something unexpected happened. The car stopped, paused for a moment, and then made a U turn in the middle of the road. It headed back in the opposite direction! A police car raced after the car. Once apprehended, the driver was asked why he turned around. He said, "Oh, when I saw the sign about a \$1 toll to go over the bridge, I decided I didn't want to pay the price." Hmm. You're not willing to give up \$1 to get \$1,000? A silly choice, yes? But all too many people make a decision that's even more impossible to defend. They think surrendering their lives to Jesus and becoming His follower is just too high a price to pay. But when you compare all you gain by following Jesus with all you give up, it makes even less sense than giving \$1,000 to save \$1.

We're in the midst of a series of messages on the Holy Spirit: "Invasion From Above: Why the Holy Spirit Matters." Today, I'd like to explore with you the significance of two lesser known images, pictures, or metaphors of the Holy Spirit and His ministry in our lives. First, the Holy Spirit is like a seal and, secondly, He's like a deposit or a down payment. Both pictures have in common the fact they're commercial or business related metaphors. Both of them also underline the often unrealized wealth of what we have received as followers of Jesus. Spiritually speaking, you and I can resemble people who've been given a gift card worth billions but we refuse to use it. We prefer spiritual poverty despite the fact we're spiritually wealthy. Two passages in the Bible both refer to the Holy Spirit as a seal and a deposit. When you become a follower of Jesus, the Holy Spirit begins to live in you. When that happens, two very important, life-changing facts become true about you and me spiritually. First, the Spirit is...

A SEAL: IT'S THE MARK I'M OWNED BY GOD.

Seals were a big deal 2,000 years ago when the New Testament was written. Fewer people could read and write in those days and so a seal was like a signature. It was a mark or an insignia of some kind that was then impressed on a surface like soft clay and allowed to harden so it become a stamp or a seal. Important people had their own personal seals. Seals indicated when a business transaction of some kind was completed or it was often used as a sign of ownership. If you put your seal on something, it belonged to you. 2,000 years ago seals were used to mark packages, letters, livestock (much like a brand on cattle), and even used on human slaves. Seals were a mark of ownership.

There were many different religions 2,000 years ago – just like today. Many followers of these different faiths would get tattooed with a special mark – a seal – to indicate their allegiance to their religion. Jewish people back then – as many still continue to do today - circumcised their male children as a mark of the child belonging to God. Paul borrowed that idea and said in effect, “Well, followers of Jesus have a seal, too.” What is it? What’s the indication, the mark, the sign we belong to God? It’s not water baptism. It’s not confirmation. It’s not a piece of paper saying you’re a member of this or some other church. The Bible says, “When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.” (Eph. 1:13 NIV) The presence of the Holy Spirit in your life and mine is the mark of God’s ownership. “Now it is God who... set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts.” (2 Cor. 1:21-22 NIV) When did you and I get sealed? The moment you became a follower of Jesus. When you surrender your life to Him in an act of faith and put your trust in Him. The presence of the Holy Spirit in your life is a sign, an indicator, a mark that God owns you.

Something else about ancient seals. They conveyed both authority and authenticity. They conveyed the authority or power of whoever did the sealing. When Daniel, the Old Testament prophet, was thrown in the lion’s den, the king sealed it with his own seal meaning no one was supposed to try and rescue Daniel. If so, that person would have to answer to the king. When Jesus’ dead body was put in the tomb, Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, ordered it sealed under the authority of the Roman government. No one was to try and take the body of Jesus away without Pilate’s permission. We all know how that turned out! Likewise, when the Holy Spirit is present in your life, He’s the mark of God’s authority or power in you. Also, in the ancient world, when you sealed something it meant whatever you were sealing was authentic, valid, the real deal. The Holy Spirit’s presence in your life is also the mark that you’re an authentic follower of Jesus. You’re the real deal spiritually.

Part of the Holy Spirit’s ministry is to constantly assure and reassure you and me that we belong to God. Why? He wants you to enjoy and be secure in the knowledge that God owns you. One of the great debates among Christians is whether a Christian can lose his or her salvation. I am among those who believe that a true child of God can never get kicked out of God’s family. Yes, a Christian can mess up terribly, grieve the Holy Spirit, hurt others, and be out of any meaningful contact with God for a long time. But if the Holy Spirit truly lives in you, you will repent and return to the Lord eventually. So, yes, I believe wholeheartedly in eternal security, because the only alternative is eternal insecurity. I don’t believe God wants us to operate on that level spiritually. The seal of God – the Holy Spirit Himself – brings deep assurance of that eternal connection to God. The Bible says, “And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom. 8:38-39 NLT)

I don't know if they're still used or not, but when hurricanes have entered the Gulf of Mexico, the oil rigs located there sometimes use a pretty cool rescue device. Rig workers can scramble into a bullet-shaped "bus" and strap themselves into its seats. Then the vehicle is released down a chute and projected away from the oil rig. The capsule will bob around in the ocean until rescuers come to pick it up. You and I are going to face some hurricanes in life – not literally, but instead figuratively. But your ultimate welfare is secure because you've been put into the ultimate rescue device – the Holy Spirit Himself. When you're in Him and He's in you, you are secure forever.

Because you're owned by God, you are now God's property forever. That's the assumption when the Bible says, "Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body." (1 Cor. 6:19-20 NLT) When you remember every day Who it is that lives inside of you, it can mean the difference between frustrated and meaningful life in Jesus. Some followers of Jesus live defeated lives just lurching from one crisis to another with no sense of ever overcoming. Other Christians are able to deal with life's ups and down in productive, God-honoring ways. Why? It's not the presence of the Holy Spirit. He indwells every genuine believer. The issue is one of recognition. Some Christians acknowledge the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives and joyfully live out the fact they're owned by God – they're quite happy to be God's property. Others, frankly, try to continue to be their own masters and suffer the consequences.

The Holy Spirit is your seal meaning God owns you. You're His property. Once He entered your life, the Spirit began this life long process of turning you from a self-centered person into a God-centered person. When God owns you, He has the right to make any demand of you at any time at any place for any reason. And because the Holy Spirit lives within you, you now have the ability to become who God wants you to be and to do what God wants you to do. You now have the privilege to be His servant.

Before indoor plumbing, people got their water from surface wells that you had to pump by hand. As long as you pumped, water would come, but when you stopped, so did the water. Some wells also needed to be primed. You had to leave a little water in a jar to prime the pump so that you could get it going the next time. I've known Christians like that – people who need to be primed, pumped, pleaded, and begged to do much of anything for the Kingdom of God. But there's such a thing as an artesian well, too. You just connect up to it and turn on the spigot. It will just flow and keep on flowing until you turn it off. I've known followers of Jesus like that, too. They're filled with the Holy Spirit and just look for places to make an impact for Jesus. They're always willing, ready, and eager to reach out. Just like there are differences between wells, there are difference between Christians. Are you more like the artesian well or the surface kind that need to be primed and pumped? The Bible uses another picture or metaphor from the world of business to help us understand why the Holy Spirit matters. He is also like...

A DEPOSIT: IT'S THE MARK I'M OWED BY GOD.

This picture or metaphor of the Holy Spirit is more easily understood because it's still very much a part of our lives today. We don't use seals anymore, but we're all well acquainted with the practice of providing a deposit or a down payment when we're purchasing a big ticket item like a house or a car. It's interesting to find the language of debt being used to describe our relationship with God. It's certainly true each of us owe a debt to God that we can never repay. But when the Holy Spirit is compared to a deposit or a down payment, this isn't about what we owe God or the fact that we are in His debt eternally. Surprisingly, it's just the opposite! The presence of the Holy Spirit in your life and mine is the sign that God actually owes you and me something. Take that truth in for a moment! God has made Himself a debtor to you and me.

Consider again the two Scripture passages we read earlier. One says, "And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own (the literal word there is "seal") by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago. The Spirit is God's guarantee that he will give us the inheritance he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people." (Eph. 1:13-14 NLT) The other one says, "He has identified us as his own by placing the Holy Spirit in our hearts as the first installment that guarantees everything he has promised us." (2 Cor. 1:22 NLT) When you buy a house or a car and you want to finance the rest of it, you're usually required to make a sizeable down payment or deposit. It's part of the purchase price. It's usually a significant amount because it indicates your willingness to pay the whole amount eventually. The deposit often guarantees the contract.

When you first put your trust in Jesus, God sent His Spirit into your spirit as a kind of initial deposit. He's like an incredibly significant first installment of everything else God is going to give you as His child. The Holy Spirit's actual presence in your life is part of the whole gift of a relationship with God. God hasn't given us everything He plans to give us yet. That will happen in Heaven someday. But right now, you and I get a foretaste or an appetizer of what God has in store for everyone the Holy Spirit indwells. God whets our appetite for all He intends to give us in the future by giving us the Holy Spirit right now today. Here's the fact that should boggle your mind. Almighty God has obligated Himself to little you and little me by giving us His Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit makes the contract – the relationship between God and us – valid, authentic, and in force. The Holy Spirit is the first and greatest installment of everything God wants to pour out and into us as His children. It's as if God says, "When I give you My Spirit, He is the down payment. I now owe you the rest of what I've agreed to give you. I put Myself in your debt." How amazing is that!

I've learned the original Greek word for "deposit" used in the New Testament is still used in modern Greek today. It refers to a woman's engagement ring. An engagement ring is kind of like a down payment or a deposit. The man is saying to the woman she can expect a whole lot more in care and provision if she will marry him. The ring is a symbolic promise to provide love and care for the rest of her life. But he offers a ring to her right now – today – because he wants her to have a foretaste or a promise of what their future relationship will be like. The Holy Spirit is God's promise given to you and

me marking the eternal nature of our relationship. By giving us His Spirit, God is saying one day we will still die, yes, but we will then find ourselves in Heaven for all eternity. One day we'll say goodbye to sick bodies, personal failures, frustration, heartaches, and tears. One day, despite our current failures, the character of Jesus will be clearly demonstrated in our lives consistently and without blemish.

Today the Holy Spirit already gives you and me just a taste of the joy and love we're going to receive in full later on. Today the Holy Spirit has already begun to change our attitudes and alter our behavior so they increasingly please God. Today the Holy Spirit is reminding and assuring us often that we really are God's children. Today the Holy Spirit gives you a spiritual power and ability to be and to do what honors God. Today the Holy Spirit gives you a peace that passes human comprehension as you face life's tests. The presence of the Holy Spirit means you are owed something. God has graciously put Himself in your debt. He promises to honor and fulfill this arrangement. Now we can better appreciate what the Bible says, "Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else?" (Rom. 8:32 NLT) Yes. The answer is yes. The presence of the Holy Spirit guarantees it.

Every Christian should know something about David Livingstone, the Scottish missionary doctor who did so much to open up the continent of Africa to the message of Jesus back in the 1800s. He's one of the great heroes of the Christian faith. In 1856, Livingstone was facing one of the greatest dangers of his 16 years serving on the continent of Africa. He had to pass through the territory of a local chief – a man by the name of Mburuma. The chief wasn't only hostile to Livingstone himself, but was also seeking to get the whole population aroused against Livingstone's expedition. Warning after warning had been given to Livingstone to turn around, to retreat, to not proceed. There were frequent reports that native warriors were creeping through the jungle towards Livingstone's camp. Alone in his tent, Livingstone opened his Bible to a promise upon which he had staked his life more than once. Then he wrote these stirring and eloquent words in his journal:

"January 14, 1856. Evening. Felt much turmoil of spirit in view of having all my plans for the welfare of this great region and teeming population knocked on its head by savages tomorrow. But I read that Jesus came and said, 'All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations... and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.' It's the word of a Gentleman of the most sacred and strictest honor, and there's an end on it! I will not cross furtively by night as intended.... Nay, verily. I shall take observations of latitude and longitude tonight, though they may be the last. I feel quite calm now, thank God!"

During the night nothing happened. The next morning, Livingstone – still calm and at peace – directed the crossing of the river for his 114 men and their oxen while Mburuma and his warriors watched from the jungle's edge. Deliberately, Livingstone reserved the last place in the last canoe for himself. Someone in his group pleaded with him not to give the chief the chance to shoot him in the back. "Tell him to observe that I am not

afraid,” Livingstone replied. Then with quiet dignity, he thanked the astonished natives he was leaving behind, wished them God’s peace, and walked very slowly to the canoe never looking back. No hand was raised against David Livingstone.

“It’s the word of a Gentleman of the most sacred and strictest honor, and there’s an end on it!” Followers of Jesus suffer tragedies, setbacks, and great challenges just like everyone else. Why put your trust in Jesus? Because you are owned and owed by God. We face uncertainty and times when the future before us is unknown and perhaps frightening. Why find courage in Jesus? Because you are owned and owed by God. Christians will face death one day just like everyone else. Why put your hope in Jesus and a place called Heaven? Because you are owned and owed by God. The Holy Spirit is both the seal and the deposit of all God is, all God gives, all God has done, and all God will yet do. If He lives within you today, you are both owned and owed by God.