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Acts of the Apostles

Living Praise Presbyterian Church - Home Cell Group Bible Study Feb-Jul 2001



EMPOWERED WITNESSES

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The Day of Pentecost

And this is what happened! Three thousand of those who heard the word that day repented, believed and were baptized with water. And although we are not specifically told that they received the remission of sins and the gift of the Spirit, yet the strong presumption is that they did. This is not a precarious argument from silence. It is based on the equivocal promise of the apostle Peter that they would receive these gifts if they repented, believed and were baptized. We are told that they were baptized (vv41), having 'received the word' (i.e. with penitent faith). Since they thus fulfilled the conditions, God must have fulfilled his promise. This means that, according to the second chapter of Acts, two separate companies of people received the 'baptism' or 'gift' of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost - the 120 at the beginning of the chapter, and the 3,000 at the end.

The 3,000 do not seem to have experienced the same miraculous phenomena (the rushing mighty wind, the tongues of flame, or the speech in foreign languages). At least nothing is said about these things. Yet because of God's assurance through Peter they must have inherited the same promise and received the same gift (vv33,39). Nevertheless, there was this difference between them: the 120 were regenerate already, and received the baptism of the Spirit only after waiting upon God for ten days. The 3,000 on the other hand were unbelievers, and received the forgiveness of their sins and the gift of the Spirit simultaneously - and it happened immediately they repented and believed, without any need to wait.

This distinction between the two companies, the 120 and 3,000, is of great importance, because the *norm* for today must surely be the second group, the 3,000, and not (as is often supposed) the first. The fact that the experience of the 120 was in two distinct stages was due simply to historical circumstances. They could not have received the Pentecostal gift before Pentecost. But those historical circumstances have long since ceased to exist. We live after the event of Pentecost, like the 3,000. With us, therefore, as with them, the forgiveness of sins and the 'gift' of 'baptism' of the Spirit are received together.

This is not to say that everything connected with the second group on the Day of Pentecost is normative for Christian experience today. I think it will be agreed that the ingathering of 3,000 converts as the result of a single sermon was a bit exceptional; it is certainly not the average expectation of an evangelist in the modern world!

The truth is that the Day of Pentecost had at least two distinct meanings, and a failure to grasp the distinction between them lies at the root of much modern confusion. In the first place, it was the last event of the saving career of Jesus, the long-promised outpouring of the Spirit consequent upon his death, resurrection and ascension. As such it completed the inauguration of the new or Messianic age, the age of the Spirit. In itself it is unrepeatable, as unrepeatable as the Saviour's death, resurrection and ascension which preceded it. But its blessings are for all who belong to Christ. All Christians since that day, without any exception, have become participants in this new age and have received the gifts of forgiveness and the Spirit which Christ made available by his death, resurrection, ascension and outpouring of the Spirit. In this same sense those converted on the Day of Pentecost as a result of Peter's sermon were typical of all subsequent believers.

But the Day of Pentecost had another and more unusual meaning. It was the fulfilment not only of the general Old Testament expectation of the Spirit's coming, but also of those special promises of Jesus in the Upper Room which were addressed primarily to the apostles and whose fulfilment was intended to equip them for their particular apostolic work as inspired and authoritative teachers.

Pentecost may also have a third significance. It may rightly be considered the first 'revival,' the first time the Spirit put forth his power in such an abundant measure that as many as 3,000 were simultaneously convicted of sin, born again and welcomed into the Christian community. Such revivals or unusual manifestations of the Spirit's power have continued in the history of the Christian church from time to time. But they cannot be regarded as norm.

(from *Baptism and Fullness* by John R. W. Stott)



At my school of nursing, a group of final year students wanted to communicate the message of Jesus to the incoming class of freshmen. They realized that there was only one source to accomplish this task - the power of the Holy Spirit. So they decided to pray for each new student by name weeks before they arrived on campus. As a result, many who did not know Jesus when they arrived graduated as maturing Christians.

REFLECTION:

What do you think it would be like if the Holy Spirit were suddenly taken away from our church?

DISCOVERY:

1. Read Acts 2. Imagine that you were there on the Day of Pentecost. What do you think it would have been like for you as one of the crowd looking on?

2. How do the Jews respond to the power of the Spirit which they witness?

3. Why do you think they react this way?



A transformed group stood beside a transformed Peter as he announced some weeks later: "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

No timidity in his words. No reluctance. About three thousand people believed his message. The apostles sparked a movement. The people became followers of the death-conqueror. They couldn't hear enough or say enough about him...Christ was their model, their message. They preached "Jesus Christ and him crucified," not for the lack of another topic, but because they couldn't exhaust this one.

What unlocked the doors of the apostles' hearts?

Simple. They saw Jesus. They encountered the Christ. Their sins collided with their Savior and their Savior won!...

A lot of things would happen to them over the next few decades. Many nights would be spent away from home. Hunger would gnaw at their bellies. Rain would soak their skin. Stones would bruise their bodies. Shipwrecks, lashings, martyrdom. But there was a scene in the repertoire of memories that caused them to never look back: the betrayed coming back to find his betrayers; not to scourge them, but to send them. Not to criticize them for forgetting, but to commission them to remember. Remember that he who was dead is alive and they who were guilty have been forgiven.

(from *Six Hours One Friday*) **Max Lucado**

4. Here, we see Peter as a dynamic leader and preacher. The power of the Holy Spirit has changed him from a timid coward into a leader. God's word has been foundational to this process and to the proclamation of faith. How has the book of Joel (quoted by Peter) been a message of change at this time?
5. What is there in Peter's sermon that would reassure Theophilus about his faith and help him "know the certainty of things" that he'd been taught?
6. What does Peter have to offer to those who responded to his message (vv37-39)?
 - a. How has your life been affected by the Holy Spirit?
7. Describe the fellowship of the believers in this young church (vv42-47).
8. What were their priorities?
 - b. How does the life and purpose of your church compare to that of this group?
9. What are the ways you see the power of the Holy Spirit demonstrated throughout this chapter?
 - c. How does your church need to change in order to see the power of the Holy Spirit demonstrated in these ways?



A Topical Study: The Holy Spirit

I will **pour out my Spirit** on all people.
(Joel 2:28 & Acts 2:17)

It is of the utmost importance that we know who or what the Holy Spirit is: whether the Holy Spirit is simply an *influence* emanating from God, a *power* that God imparts to us, or whether the Holy Spirit is a *person*. The Scriptures teach that the Holy Spirit is a divine person, the third Person of the Trinity. He is not an influence that we are somehow to get hold of and use. Furthermore, the Scriptures teach that this divine Person, infinitely wise, holy and tender, was sent to us to take the place of the ascended Lord ; and that He is in the world today, doing His appointed work. Does it not behoove us to search the Scriptures diligently and learn all we can about the Holy Spirit?

1. The Personality of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is a Person is implied throughout the Scriptures. He has personal characteristics like: intellect (1 Cor 12:11); emotion (Rom 15:30); will (1 Cor 12:11). But the doctrine of His personality is also expressly declared in John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:7-15. Note the personal pronouns in these passages. Christ referred to the Holy Spirit not as *it* but as *He*. The Holy Spirit is a divine person. He is one of the three Persons of the Trinity (Mat 28:19; 1 Cor 12:4-6; 2 Cor 13:14; Acts 5:3-4).

2. The Works of the Holy Spirit

It amazes one to realize the large number of different works in which the Holy Spirit is engaged in. As an exercise, record the work cited in each of the following passages:

John 14:26
John 15:26
John 16:8
Acts 5:30-32
Acts 13:2-4
Acts 16:6-7
Titus 3:5
John 3:5
1 Cor 3:16
1 Cor 12:4-11
Eph 3:16
Eph 4:30
Eph 5:18
Rom 8:11
Rom 8:14
Rom 8:26
Gal 5:22-23

3. The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit takes up His dwelling in the heart of the believer at the moment of regeneration (John 14:17; 1 Cor 6:19; Rom 8:9). So *all* believers are indwelt by the Spirit. Some believers are not aware of this blessed truth. Christians can suppress His activity by grieving Him (Eph 4:30) and quenching Him (1 Thes 5:19). He wants control of our whole being - spirit, soul, and body - but does not force this on anyone.

If we are children of God we are not so much to pray that the Spirit may come and dwell in us; for He does that already. We are rather to recognize His presence, His gracious and glorious indwelling, and give Him complete control of the house He already inhabits, and strive to so live as not to grieve this Holy One, this Divine guest.
(R.A. Torrey, *What the Bible Teaches*)

4. The Filling of the Holy Spirit

All believers are indwelt by the Spirit; not all believers are filled with the Spirit. The one conditional work of the Holy Spirit with respect to the Christian is that of filling. Every child of God is commanded to be filled with the Spirit. It should be the *normal* Christian relationship to the Spirit. "Be filled (literally, be being filled) with the Spirit (Eph 5:18b). The conditions for such day-to-day filling or control are:

1. a yielded will ("quench not" 1 Thes 5:19)
2. confessed sin ("grieve not" Eph 4:30)
3. faith and obedience ("walk by" Gal 5:16)

All Christians should be Spirit-filled Christians, for this is God's will for His people. Do we recognize the Holy Spirit as a real, divine Person dwelling in us and wanting control over us each day of our lives?

A Final Thought:

The closing verses of Acts 2 tell us that the early Christians dwelt together in a fellowship of love. Only the Holy Spirit in control of their hearts made this possible. Compare the familiar apostolic benediction: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and *the fellowship of the Holy Spirit* be with you all" (2 Cor 13:13).

Sources:

John R. W. Stott, **Baptism and Fullness**.
Irving Jensen, **Acts - A Self-study Guide**.
Phyllis J. Le Peau, **Acts**.
Max Lucado. **Life Lessons with Max Lucado: Book of Acts**.