

LESSONS IN THE REARVIEW MIRROR

HOLY SPIRIT: GOD ACTS

JOHN 14:12-14

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.”

If the Atlanta Braves make it to this year’s World Series a big reason will be their bullpen. On most nights *Eric O’Flaherty*, and *Jonny Venters*, and *Craig Kimbrel* are a shut down combination. Here’s the winning formula... The starting pitcher works 6 innings; then the bullpen handles the 7th, 8th, and 9th. If the Braves lead after six - the odds are, *they’ll win the game*.

And likewise Christianity has a good bullpen... Jesus was our starter! He took on flesh and blood, and showed us what God is like. He shouldered our sin - died in our place - and rose to live in our hearts. But that’s when Jesus pulled Himself. He ascended to heaven. And the team turned to its bullpen. The Holy Spirit took the mound. Hey, *Christianity has a closer!* Through the Holy Ghost, God continues to act!

The Book of Acts is a sequel... Like “*Rocky II*,” or “*The Empire Strikes Back...*” it’s a follow up. It’s accompanying volume was the Gospel of Luke. This is why the author opens Acts with the words, “*The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach...*” Notice the operative word. The Gospel of Luke concerned “*all that Jesus began... to do and teach.*” Implied is that His work hasn’t stop. What Luke’s Gospel records was just the beginning... After *His ascension into heaven*, Jesus continued *His activity on the earth*. Jesus kept on doing and teaching through His Church. Thus the sequel, “*The Acts of the Apostles...*” And even today Jesus *acts*. Our Lord continues to do and teach. He works through His people by the agency and power of the Holy Ghost.

The *Savior’s ascent* to the Father, allowed for the *Spirit’s descent* upon the Church. *God comes*. As we learned last week, *God is always coming to His people*. “*Come*” is God’s posture. *God came* to Earth in the first century in the person of Jesus. Now He *comes* into the world today through the person of the Holy Spirit... But God doesn’t just *come*... God also acts. And His acts are ongoing... On earth Jesus healed, forgave, loved, saved – and nothing has caused His deeds to cease. Likewise today, the Holy Spirit is similarly active.

Here in John 14, Jesus told His men, “*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father.*” Survey the book of Acts, and you’ll find that no one disciple did *more* or *mightier* acts than Jesus. Take the Apostle Paul for example. He healed folks and worked miracles - but when Paul got caught in a storm he ended up shipwrecked. Jesus walked on the water... Paul floated ashore on a wooden beam.

When it came to miracle power no one person was as prolific as Jesus. But through the agency of the Holy Spirit, God is now able to work in *multiple ways*, through *multiple believers*, even in *multiple locations*... Author Walter Wink put it, “*Killing Jesus was like trying to destroy a dandelion by blowing on its head.*” Jesus ascended to the Father – but He returned - no longer confined to a single human body, but at work in countless hearts and in every corner of the planet through the Holy Spirit.

In this sense, the over-all impact of a Spirit-filled Church is *more and mightier* than the acts of Jesus. The coming of the Spirit was a boon to Christianity. *It’s nice to have a closer you can count on to finish the game!* There’s a story in Acts 3 that occurs a few days after the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Church in Jerusalem. Peter and John were on their way to the Temple as they passed a man crippled from birth. He was a beggar. His friends had positioned him near the offering boxes. He could make his appeal while worshippers had their wallets and checkbooks available.

Peter sees this man, and speaks up, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give to you; in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, rise up and walk.” Then Peter reaches down and takes the man by his hand and lifts him to his feet. I’m sure his sidekick, John, was absolutely flabbergasted. “Has Peter lost his mind?” John expects Pete to let go of the man’s hand, and his legs fold up like wet cardboard. He’ll hit hard on the marble. John is thinking that impulsive Peter is at it again. Imagine the headline in tomorrow’s Jerusalem Post... “Christians Pick on Handicap Victim.”

But as soon as Peter got the man to his feet, a miracle occurred. Acts 3:7 tells us, “Immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the Temple with them – walking, leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him...”

Over the years much has been made of Peter’s initial statement to the man, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give to you...” The story is told of the Pope who was counting the money in the church coffers. Thomas Aquinas entered the room. The Pope pointed to his riches and bragged “We no longer have to say, ‘Silver and gold have I none?’” Aquinas responded, “Yes, but neither can we say, ‘in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, rise up and walk.’” It’s a sad indictment against the church when we substitute *prosperity for power*, and put more trust in *money than miracles*. No amount of loot can buy what we need most – *spiritual power*.

Peter had something... “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give to you...” Peter had something very powerful, and important, and other-worldly in his possession. It didn’t originate in Peter. It was a gift. And it could be taken as easily as it was given. Peter was only its trustee. But Peter had something... He had the dynamic of the Holy Spirit. And this power was so real, so immediate, so available - that Peter was able to transfer it to someone who needed a work of God in his or her life. Peter had something special and He was able to give it away!

This is what I want to talk to you about this morning – the power of the Holy Spirit. God wants to act, and He works today through the Holy Ghost. Yet looking back in the rearview mirror of my Christian life, for so many years I missed out. I lacked what I needed most. I was trying to live life, *without the power I needed to live it*. The Christian life is a supernatural life. *Your willpower - your intentions – your discipline...* is never enough. As God said to His construction chief, Zerubbabel, the Temple would be built “*not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit...*” This is how every work of God gets done... *by His Spirit*. Our energy and ingenuity are inadequate.

Think of what Jesus demands from His followers... He told His disciples, “Love your enemies, bless those who curse you...” He said, “He who is greatest among you shall be your servant.” He even told us, “You shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” We read those verses and wonder how we could ever measure up.

Jesus also put a different spin on sin. He up the ante on what the OT demanded. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught, “You have heard it said of old, “*You shall not murder...*’ But I say to you whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment...” In the same sermon Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘*You shall not commit adultery.*’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her.”

According to Jesus *checkered acts* come from *unchecked attitudes*. Murder grows out of an unjustified anger. Adultery begins in the head before it ends in the bed. Jesus expects His followers to deal with the root. *Yet how do I live at such a high level?* A tinge of anger... a lustful peep... I can’t drive three miles on Hwy. 78 without being tempted by both.

The frustration level for the disciples reached a pinnacle after Jesus dismissed a rich, young ruler. He had kept all the commandments. To the disciples he was a good man... *but apparently not good enough for Jesus...* That’s when Jesus told them, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” Matthew says of the disciples, “They were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?” They threw up their hands in exasperation! “*That’s it! If this fellow can’t pass muster, there’s no hope for any of us.*”

And the disciples were right. There is no hope for any of us *unless we receive something from God – the same something that Peter received!* *So many Christians today are trying obey the Great Commission while guilty of the Great Omission.* We’ve ignored the influence of the Holy Spirit. In the Baptist church I grew up the people feared God, the pastor preached Jesus, we all believed the Bible... But the Holy Spirit was *off-limits*. *He was the taboo topic.*

Our pastor did so much tippy-toeing around the subject of the Holy Spirit you would've thought he was a ballerina. Hey, nothing is more frustrating than trying to do a job without the right tool. And that describes the task of living for Jesus without the Holy Spirit.

Jesus told His disciples, **“Let your light so shine before men...”** For the longest time, I wanted to witness for Jesus - be a light to this lost world. But I was an electric lamp that wasn't plugged in. You can change the bulb a thousand times... reposition the base... bend the gooseneck... adjust the shade... but it won't shine until it gets power.

As a kid growing up in the church here's what I didn't realize – **the Christian life is a supernatural life.** A natural life is what I can achieve on my own. I can conform to external standards... I can grind out a few good deeds... I can maintain an outward respectability... *But this is a religious life, not a Christian life.* A truly Christian life is never achieved on our own. It requires *wisdom from above*, and *mercy that springs from the heart of God*, and *peace that passes all understanding*, and *gifts of the Holy Spirit*, and *boldness that comes from God*, and *perfect love that casts out fear.*

Certainly, the Christian life is lived out in *natural ways*. Christians run the same course - jump through the same hoops – pay the same bills – as do their unbelieving neighbors. God wants us to be involved in our world. But the life we live is *supra-natural* – it exceeds what's naturally available. It taps into resources that are beyond the reach of other people. The Christian life is an overcoming life and that demands a power greater than my own. A *truly Christian life* doesn't really begin, until like Peter, I receive something strong and supernatural from the Holy Spirit.

Some of the most revolutionary words ever spoken came from a wild man who broke with the protocols of his day. John the Baptizer shattered the mold. He came out of the desert preaching repentance, *and baptizing Jews of all people! Jews didn't get baptized. Only Gentiles were baptized.* But John lived outside Jerusalem and the religious bubble. He saw that *the self-righteousness of God's people* - was every bit as sinful as *the unrighteousness of the pagans*. John called the nation to act. And to the waters of the Jordan River, Jews began to flood. *They were hungry for God, and disgusted with their own hypocrisy.* Ironically, the people of God had turned their backs on the God they supposedly served. John's baptism was a cleansing of sorts. It was a show of repentance. The Jews were turning their backs on their sin and self-righteousness.

But John knew his work was incomplete. Repentance is never enough. In addition to turning from your sin - *you have to get something from God!* John told his disciples, **“I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”** John's baptism brought the recognition that *something was wrong – that's a first step!* But it brought nothing else. It left us empty. Yet when Jesus baptizes us with the Spirit, He immerses us in the good things of God. We receive from God something precious and powerful.

In Matthew 12 Jesus speaks of a demon who exits a man's life. He roams the earth, looking for a suitable abode elsewhere, but when he strikes out, he returns to his former home. And guess how he finds it... It's swept clean. It's spic and span, yet it's empty! So what does the demon do? He returns, and brings seven other buddies with him. Jesus says, **“The last state of the man is worse than the first.”** Here's the plight of a person who only experiences repentance.

I remember going to church and being so convicted of my sin. Our preacher knew all the buttons to push. He could stir up the guilt. And I'd rush the altar with a tearful confession. Every Sunday was spring cleaning. I would leave church with a resolved conscience, but a vacant heart. You can rid yourself of sin and guilt, yet still not receive the power you need from God. Sin gets swept away, but your heart remains empty.

And when the next wave of temptation rolls in you're no more ready to resist this time, than you were at first. If repentance is all you know, you're doomed to repeat your sin. *Your last state ends up worse than the first!* The pull of temptation can be strong. That's why the best way to resist it is to get caught up in something stronger - a power greater than your sin. And is there anything on earth more formidable than the power of God? Peter told the beggar, **“but what I have I give to you”** – the power Peter received from God healed the man's crippled legs. Don't think for a second it won't lift a depression - or overcome a fear - or heal an illness – or end your loneliness - or provide you boldness – or comfort you in your loss...

This is why repentance is never enough. God doesn't just want your heart swept clean. Repentance is a feather duster. It gets rid of the dust, but it doesn't leave a nice polish. It doesn't create an attractive shine. This is why we also need to be saturated with the oil of the Holy Spirit. When you come to God an exchange takes place. You leave your sin on the shoulders of Jesus, then you get something holy to take sin's place.

In the Book of Acts when believers were baptized with the Holy Ghost various acts followed – *healings* and *faith* and *miracles* and *wisdom*... When you get something from God it can be whatever you need. Acts 3 is a great example. For Peter to lift up the crippled man he needed faith. I'm sure John shuttered, "*Whatever you do, don't drop him?*" But later Peter tells us the back story. His faith that day had come from the Holy Spirit. It was the gift of faith. It wasn't just the ordinary, daily kind of faith we're all expected to have. It was a supernatural allotment of faith.

There are occasions in the book of Acts when people are given insight into situations that only God would've known... they're given boldness to speak for God even in the face of violent opposition... sometimes, the something they get is the power to heal... in Acts 13 Paul is baptized with the Spirit, looks a blasphemer in the eye, and orders up his blindness... Wild and wooly stuff go on when God's people are filled with His Spirit. Ananias and Sapphira lie to the Holy Spirit, and the deceivers drop dead.

The last verse in 1 Corinthians 14 concludes Paul's instructions on the use of the gifts of the Spirit in the Church. He says, "*Let all things be done decently and in order.*" The Church is told to use discretion and proper etiquette in the exercise of spiritual gifts. But that doesn't mean the Holy Spirit always works "*decently and orderly.*" *The Spirit does as He pleases.* There's one certainty, when God unleashes His Spirit He intends to act! Jesus is still in the world today doing and teaching through the Holy Spirit.

In fact, the activity of the Holy Spirit is the seal that marks a person as God's purchased possession. The Spirit is God's brand, or coat of arms. In the ancient world every business and government had their own seal. When a buyer combed through the market and made his purchase he affixed his seal to the shipment. The seal was his mark of ownership. When it made it's destination it was off-loaded and identified by its seal.

This becomes the background for Ephesians 1:13, "*In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit...*" You and I were purchased by Jesus on the cross, but now it's the Holy Spirit's activity in our lives that identifies us as belonging to Him.

When Jesus saves us *He gets hold of us!* He cleanses us and changes us. But when He baptizes us with the Holy Spirit *we get hold of Him!* We get a taste of God. We experience a little bit of heaven on earth. This is the Christian's take-away. When I get something from God – a power, or wisdom, or gift - it assures me and everyone else that I belong to Jesus. When the Holy Spirit acts in a way that I can either see, or feel, or know it seals my relationship with God. I know that I know I belong to Him.

Let me share with you my testimony... After I gave my life to Jesus I developed a passionate love for people. Overnight I became aware that Jesus died for every person I ever met. I'd drive past a movie theater, and see people hanging out in the parking lot and start thinking, "*How can I reach those people for Jesus?*"

I'll never forget driving home one night when I saw a group of my peers hanging out in front of the Golden Pantry. I felt this heavenly urge to stop and tell them about Jesus. But like the brave, obedient fellow I am, I kept right on driving. I tucked tail and headed home. And I felt so defeated. I recall flopping face down on the living room floor and admitting to God that I was chicken. I was afraid. I cared more about what people thought of me, than about what God thought of me. I was completely powerless.

Yet before I finished praying, something came over me – something supernatural. *I got something from God.* It was a boldness. I rose to my feet, got back in my car, and drove to the hang out – *and guess what? Nobody was there. The parking lot had been vacated...* But they were there the next night - and I stopped. I was able to witness to the whole bunch of them. Even prayed with two fellows to receive Jesus. I learned that night what it meant to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

And since that time I've been filled with the Holy Spirit numerous times. Famous pastor, RA Torrey, once wrote, "We need to be filled again and again with the Holy Spirit. I am sometimes asked, 'Have you received the second blessing? Yes, and the third and the fourth and the fifth and hundreds beside, and I am looking for a new blessing today.'" Even if I've been filled with the Holy Spirit before, God may want to do a new work in my life today! Perhaps you've run dry. You're depleted. You can't give what you don't have. This is why Peter said to the crippled man, "what I do have I give to you..." Do you need to get something from God?

In Acts 19 Paul came to Ephesus. We're told in verse 2, "And finding some disciples (Paul) said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" So they said to him, "We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." Here's a great tragedy - yet for many years in my life, this was the very issue that robbed me of victory and usefulness. *Did I have the Holy Spirit?* Sure I did. Romans 8 tells us we can't be a Christian without the Holy Spirit. The moment we're saved He purchases us as His own. He takes possession. The Holy Ghost *comes* to dwell in us. But the Ephesians had not been baptized with the Spirit. God *acts* - He does stuff - we get something - when we're filled with the Holy Spirit.

It's interesting what Paul asks the Ephesians, "And he said to them, "Into what then were you baptized?" So they said, "Into John's baptism." Again, here was the problem. They only knew John's baptism. The Ephesians had turned from sin, but they'd yet to get something from God in return. Jesus purchased them a pardon, but they still lacked His power... Remember, it's possible to be free from sin... Yet because the pull of temptation is still strong - *To live free and stay free you need a power stronger than your temptation.* You need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The story ends for the Ephesians, "Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus... And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them..."

Last week, I complimented us on the responsible life most of us live. We mow our lawn, and pay our bills, and raise our kids - and this is all good. But often the good can rob us of the best. The tangible can crowd out the spiritual. I encouraged us to push back and make some room around our hearts. Create some spiritual space for the Holy Spirit to come. But this week I want to take it one step further. You not only need to make room, you need to receive something precious and powerful from God. *God comes* and *God acts*... He wants you to live a supernatural life.

We're going to take communion and as we come to rejoice in the price that's been paid, let's remember Jesus purchased us with His blood, but He seals us with His Spirit. He not only *cleans us up* - Jesus *fills us up*. After you come and take the bread and wine if you want something supernatural from God, our pastors and elders will be here in the altar. We'll lay hands on you and ask God to baptize you with the Holy Spirit.