

SPIRIT EMPOWERMENT

ACTS 1:1-9

The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

Have you ever had an ambition... something you wanted to do with all your heart? You spent long hours practicing and prepping - and just before you were to perform - someone said, *"you aren't quite ready!"*

Years ago now, God gave me a song. It was a little worship tune that popped into my head one day.

I decided I would sing it and teach it to the church.

I practiced and practiced that song. In the car, the shower, the office - all day long I sang my song. *I was almost reading to teach it to Calvary Chapel SM, when I made the fatal mistake of sharing it with my wife.*

I just wanted Kathy to tell me how good I sounded.

I'll never forget her tender counsel, "You can't be serious! You'll embarrass the whole family! God may've given you that song, but He never intended for you to give it to anyone else. Trust me, it was just for you!"

Well, I swallowed my pride, and received her wise counsel. I concluded, *"I just wasn't quite ready!"*

And neither were the disciples...

There were forty days between the resurrection of Jesus and His ascension into heaven. And for the disciples these were forty days of unimaginable thrills!

They were hanging out with the One who conquered death. If ever they'd doubted Jesus was God - now in His very real presence, all those doubts had vanished!

They cherished every second they spent with Jesus.

They hung on His every word... Their hearts burned within them when they were with Him... These were forty days the disciples hoped would never end...

But they did come to an end...

Just before Jesus ascended back to heaven He gave His disciples new marching orders. He commanded them, "Go... and make disciples of all the nations..."

It was quite a commission for a handful of frightened men who five weeks earlier had tucked tail and run scared. They'd publicly denied and forsaken their Lord.

Yet if ever there was a time to start over, this was it! Their days with the risen Christ stirred their hearts.

I would've expected Jesus to seize the momentum, and harness their zeal, and take advantage of their excitement, and thrust them headlong into the world at that very moment - *but that's not what He did!*

Instead, Jesus does just the opposite. He tells his disciples to return home to Jerusalem, and wait!

WAIT! Why wait?

Weren't they ready? Weren't they qualified?

Actually, according to modern missionary standards there've never been 11 more qualified men in history!

For one, they were **educated**. For 3.5 years they were home schooled by the Master-Teacher Jesus.

Also they were **experienced**. They'd witnessed miracles - even performed miracles themselves. Jesus sent them out to heal the sick and cast out demons.

And they were **committed** men. The disciples had proven their devotion to Jesus - they had left behind houses, and businesses, and families to follow Him!

And finally, the disciples were **regenerated** men.

They were saved, born-again. John 20:22 tells us, "Jesus breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit." As the Father breathed physical life into Adam, the Lord Jesus breathed into His disciples and they became spiritually alive with the life of God.

Here were *educated, experienced, committed, and regenerated* men, but there was one thing they lacked.

There was one missing entry on their spiritual resume' - and it was *the power of the Holy Spirit*.

They had received the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, but now they needed to be immersed or baptized in the supernatural power of the same Spirit.

Jesus knew His disciples could get only so far *riding the rush* of sheer excitement. Enthusiasm alone would not be enough to face down the opposition - and the persecution - and the difficulties they would encounter.

They needed a supernatural burst - *a punch of spiritual strength!* They needed the power of the Spirit!

Jesus knew that in fighting the superpowers of the flesh, the world, and the devil - conventional weapons are inadequate. The disciples needed a super-powered arsenal. Thus, before moving them forward He sends them back to Jerusalem to wait for the Spirit's power.

There is an legend I once heard about the great NASCAR driver, Donnie Allison. In a Daytona 500, Allison got off to a good start - yet just two laps into the race something went

wrong. In the first turn his car stalled out. Allison rolled off the track into the infield.

It didn't take long to discover the problem... *No one in Allison's crew had bothered to fill the car with gas.*

Donnie Allison was an experienced, seasoned, successful driver. His car was \$250,000 worth of precision and preparation. But the Allison crew made an *omission* that short-circuited their *mission*.

And this has happened to many Christians and churches. They sport a spiritual paint job - there's Bible knowledge, experience, even commitment under the hood - but *there's no gas in the tank*. "We'll never fulfill the Great Commission if we're guilty of the Great Omission." We need the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Bible teaches us there are three experiences we can have with God the Holy Spirit... He is **with** us, He comes to dwells **in** us, and He even comes **upon** us.

In John 14:17 Jesus told the disciples, "I will give you another helper, that He may abide **with** you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells **with** you and will be **in** you."

Before we become Christians the Spirit is "**with us.**" He's the "**hound of heaven.**" He sniff us out, tracks us down, convicts us of sin. He reveals the love of Jesus, the reality of our sin, and our need for a Savior.

Then once we come to Jesus - the Spirit moves to dwell "**in us.**" He's our Helper. He comforts and corrects. He conveys to us God's *peace and presence.*

But there's a third experience we can have with the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised He'd come "**upon us.**"

In Acts 1:8 Jesus said, "**But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.**" More than *conviction and comfort*, more than *peace and presence*, the Spirit gives us *power to be a witness!*

It's not that we get more of God's Spirit. He isn't allocated to us in portions. If you believe in Jesus you have all of the Spirit residing in you. But there are different experiences we can have with the Holy Spirit.

Here's an illustration...

Most football teams have a water spray on the sideline. It keeps the team cooled down and refreshed.

But having water **with** them isn't the same as getting a drink. To stay hydrated players need water **in** them.

And a drink is not the same as celebrating with a gatorade shower - where water is poured out **upon!** A victory needs to be culminated with a rush of water.

Water is **with**, **in**, and **upon** a football player. It's all water, but it's different experiences that player can have with water! And so it is in our relationship with God's Spirit. He's **with us**, **in us**, and can be **upon us.**

Understand, every true Christian has the Holy Spirit residing *with* them, and alive *in* them, but not all Christians have the Spirit's power *upon* their lives!

Corrie Ten Boon once said, "It takes two batteries to energize a flashlight: the first battery is regeneration - the second battery is the baptism of the Holy Spirit."

Jesus taught that His cousin John baptized or immersed his followers with water - but He would "*baptize*" His followers with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Here in Acts the word "*baptism*" means "*to immerse.*" God wants us to overflow with the power of His Spirit.

In the NT this experience goes by different names: "*baptism,*" "*filling,*" "*pouring out,*" "*coming upon,*" "*the promise of the Father,*" "*rivers of living water,*" "*sealing of the Spirit*" - the list is long - but the experience is the same. Let there be no *confusion*. The Spirit wants to come upon believing hearts with supernatural power!

The work of the Spirit in regeneration is a secret work. It happens quietly in our hearts, but the *filling... well it's thrilling!* Waves of joy flood over your soul.

Donald Gee writes, "When you are baptized with the Holy Spirit you know it, and need no one to acquaint you with the fact... you will soon be acquainting them."

On the Day of Pentecost, when the Spirit was first poured out on waiting disciples it happened suddenly.

Acts 2:2-4 recounts the event, "*And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled*

the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

Notice this was not an outcome that came upon the disciples gradually - but suddenly. The baptism of the Spirit was a *point-in-time* experience where they were *filled in a flash - saturated in a second - juiced in a jiffy*.

I've heard people teach, “The more you yield, the more He fills.” I believe God wants us to yield our lives to Him, but nowhere in Scripture are we told that the Spirit is poured out incrementally - or the outpouring is a process. To the contrary, the baptism of the Spirit is an event that occurs... it creates a sacred moment.

I'll never forget the first time I was baptized with the Spirit... There were a group of kids hanging out on the street corner near my house. One night I felt impressed to stop and witness to them of the love of Jesus.

In the end, *I chickened out!*

I wanted to be a *witness*, but I went home feeling like a *wimp*. I needed help to be the bold witness God wanted me to be. I needed the power of the Holy Spirit.

I went home that night... laid face down on the floor in my living room... and in desperation I prayed for the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit. *I had to have it!*

Suddenly, the Holy Spirit came upon me. Jesus infused me with a love that overcame my fears.

I arose with a new boldness - a new determination to stand for Jesus. The next night I went back to the corner, shared my faith, and several kids responded.

And since that time I've been filled with the Holy Spirit over and over. It's interesting the same crowd that's baptized in the Spirit in Acts 2, gets filled with the Spirit again in Acts 4. *The Spirit's baptism is a point-in-time experience, but it's not a one-time experience.*

It can be repeated time and again as needed.

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 you've been filled with the Holy Spirit before; perhaps, God wants to do a new work in your life this morning! Trust Him, and He'll fill you afresh. The old hymn should be our song today, *"O, for the Spirit's quickening power; O, for a soul-refreshing shower; O, for the Pentecostal power; Lord send it now."*

People often ask the question... *"How do I know if I've been filled with the Holy Spirit? What are the evidences of the baptism of the Holy Spirit?"*

Well, let's go back to the Day of Pentecost. Several phenomena accompanied the initial filling of the Spirit...

First, was *"a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind."* A breeze roared through the room.

Throughout the Scripture the wind is symbolic of the Spirit, and a reminder of His sovereignty. Just as it's impossible to predict the changing currents, likewise it's impossible to predict the movements of the Spirit.

God's Spirit is always one step ahead. He's leading the way. He's calling the shots. It's never vice versa.

A church effective for Jesus is a Spirit-led church.

Second, on Pentecost Sunday there were forked flames of fire that settled over the disciples' heads.

Remember when Moses dedicated the Tabernacle, and again when Solomon dedicated the Temple - in both cases, God sent fire down from heaven to burn up the sacrifice. The supernatural rain of fire was God's sign that He approved of His new dwelling places.

And in Acts 2, God is dedicating another dwelling place. Pentecost was the Church's "*open house*" - and God followed His pattern by showing His approval on this new house by sending fire down from heaven.

This time though, He didn't consume dead sacrifices, rather He empowered **living sacrifices** - His people!

It's interesting, the wind and fire are never repeated in Acts. They seem to be one time experiences reserved for the dedication of the new, spiritual Temple.

But not so, with the third phenomena mentioned in Acts 2, **speaking in tongues**. The gift of tongues was exercised numerous times throughout the book of Acts.

When the Spirit came upon the believers in the upper room God gave them the capability to speak in languages other than their own known native tongue.

In Acts 2:11 Luke describes the miracle as speaking “**the wonderful works of God...**” Apparently, the gift of tongues enabled them to supernaturally praise Jesus.

Sadly, for some folks speaking in tongues is like a rattlesnake - it's something you don't want to touch. It's like poison ivy - you want to avoid it at all costs.

I grew up in a Baptist church, and I was scared to death of the gift of tongues. Our pastor wouldn't touch the subject with a 10-foot pole. In looking back though, I was robbed of a blessing by fear and ignorance...

What is the controversial, mysterious gift of tongues?

The word “**tongues**” simply means “**languages or dialects.**” The gift of tongues is the Spirit-given capacity to praise God, or pray to God, in a language other than your native tongue - or any languages you've learned.

In Acts 2:4 when the gift of tongues was first manifested we're told, “**the Spirit gave them utterance.**”

The gift of tongues wasn't a skill they were taught - it was a phenomena prompted by the Holy Spirit.

I've heard of misguided Charismatics who offer classes in tongues speaking, or have techniques they use to teach eager believers to speak in tongues...

Here's how it works... “**Now just close your eyes, loosen up your tongue, let it flap up and down - now repeat these**

words... “*Ohwah Tahgoo Siam.*” Now say it real fast over and over... “*...Oh, what a goose I am.*”

And let me say, if you think someone can teach you to speak supernaturally in tongues you are a goose!

Tongues happen when the Holy Spirit enables us to praise God in an unlearned language. It's a fulfilling experience to praise God freely and uninhibitedly!

Of the 5,665 languages in the world today, I know but one, English - and of that one, I know very little.

There are 800,000 words in the English lexicon, but the average person's daily, working vocabulary is a little more than 7,000 words. *This presents a problem...*

What happens when I can't find the right word, or I'm at a loss for words - yet, I really want to express what's on my mind or heart? There's a frustration that occurs.

Human beings are like a funnel. The narrow neck represents our intellect. The wide base is our spirit.

In the spirit we're capable of experiencing deep feelings and a wide array of emotions - yet all we sense on the spiritual level has to be channeled through a *shallow intellect* and a *limited vocabulary*.

Our narrowness cuts off the flow of feelings, and bottles up our emotions, and strangles our expression.

We're *pent-up...* and therefore, we *shut-up...* And this isn't good - for God longs for our praise and worship.

But the Holy Spirit will fill us up - and shake us up - then pop the cork, and lets the bubbly of adoration and exaltation spew

out. This is what happens when we're filled with the Holy Spirit and given the gift of tongues.

God bypasses our mental and linguistic limitations by placing words in our minds we don't understand, but we trust are the accurate expression of our hearts. By speaking the words we release all our pent-up praise!

One thing is sure - the filling of the Spirit often results in abounding joy. As Peter calls it in 1 Peter 1:8, "joy **inexpressible and full of glory!**" When the Holy Spirit comes upon you you're overwhelmed and overjoyed.

If a person has been floundering spiritually it's hard for them to grasp the importance of their praise.

When your spirit is as dry as a bone, and you feel like dust inside - it's difficult to realize why bottled-up feelings would be a problem. But when you're filled to overflowing, expression becomes a top priority!

It's like getting lockjaw on your wedding day. Imagine, being unable to verbalize your love, at the very moment when you want to communicate it best.

Or think of your favorite football team playing their arch rival, and your mouth is taped shut. It would be torture not to cheer! You would want to rip off the tape. Well, tongues is God's way of removing the tape.

The Spirit fills you with overflowing joy, love, power - then He loosens your lips to sing His wonderful praise.

Tongues is one evidence of the baptism of the Spirit. *And the Lord may want to loosen your lips today!*

Another evidence of the baptism, not mentioned in Acts 2, but spoken of elsewhere in Acts, is **prophecy**.

In Acts 19 when the believers in Ephesus were filled with the Spirit they were given *the gift of prophecy*.

They uttered unplanned, unscripted, Spirit-evoked messages that were conveyed spontaneously through them by the Holy Spirit... God gave them a message...

We get into so much trouble with our mouth, *the uncontrolled tongue*, it's no surprise that when the Holy Spirit fills us, He shows it by orchestrating our speech.

1 Corinthians 14 is a chapter that deals with spiritual gifts, and it contrasts the gift of tongues with prophecy.

Verses 2-3 read, "He who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands *him*; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries. But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men." Clearly, *tongues* is man speaking to God. Whereas, *prophecy* is God speaking to man.

Sometimes you'll hear an utterance in tongues, and someone will give a supposed interpretation that goes something like this, "My Little Children, listen to Me..."

It's as if the tongue is God speaking. It might be a word of prophecy, but it's not the interpretation of the tongue. An unknown tongue is always man praising or praying to God. While prophecy is God speaking to us.

Let me say though, there are also examples in the book of Acts where believers are filled with the Holy Spirit - and they neither speak in tongues or prophecy.

1 Corinthians 12:29-30 teaches that there are a diversity of spiritual gifts - and not all of us will receive the same gifts. That includes tongues and prophesy.

You can't say the only evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is the gift of tongues, because Paul is clear not every believer will speak in tongues - *yet, all believers need to be baptized with the Holy Spirit!*

I believe there is one sure evidence that does show up every time a believer is filled with the Holy Spirit - and that's **the love and boldness to be a witness!**

In Acts 4:31 we're told what happened just a few days after the Feast of Pentecost, "when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness."

The floor and rafters may not shake today... but God does want to fill each one of us with boldness.

God delights in turning *wimps* into *witnesses*.

When God fills us with His Spirit love and joy erupts in our hearts. It's like a volcanic explosion of grace!

We're overwhelmed by a love that's not of ourselves, and it causes us to forget our fears. We become oblivious to the opinions of others. The world's sneers, and jeers, and fears no longer intimidate us.

We're caught up - *capture and enraptured* by the love of God. We're intoxicated with the Holy Spirit!

In fact, this was the accusation made about the believers on the Day of Pentecost. They were so giddy and excited, some observers mistook them as drunk.

Acts 2:13 tells us, “Others mocking said, “They are full of new wine.” They acted as if they were tipsy.

You loose your inhibitions when you're drunk!

And likewise, when you're filled with the Holy Spirit you no longer care what people can do to you. All that matters is pleasing and glorifying our mighty God!

One day an inebriated fellow named “Charlie” was walking the street when he bumped into the pastor.

The pastor scolded him for his drunkenness, but Charlie denied he had even touched the stuff... He argued, “I'm not drunk! *Why do you think “I'm drunk?”*”

The pastor stated the obvious, “I know you're drunk by the way you're walking down the street. You've got one foot in the gutter, and the other foot on the curb.”

Ole Charlie looked up into heaven, lifted his hands to the sky, and shouted, “Well, praise the Lord, I'm healed! I thought one leg was shorter than the other!”

Let me say, when you're filled with the Spirit you too will have *one foot in the gutter and the other on the curb*. Your passion for God will lift you toward heaven.

But you'll also have a passion for people that'll keep you on the street - *even in the gutter* - seeking to share God's mercy to those who need His mercy the most.

Don't you want to be energized today?

Don't you want to be *filled* and *thrilled* with the power of the Holy Spirit? If you do, you need a little faith!

Martin Lloyd-Jones summed up the experience of many Christians when he said, "They expect nothing, and they get nothing, and nothing happens to them."

Are you tired of *wimping* out when God calls you to be a *witness*? Well, what are you expecting from God?

Let me conclude with Luke 11:13. Jesus promises us, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

If you want to be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit - you need to rise up in faith, and ask...