

06-12-11

The Comforter Has Come

Ashes to Fire

John 20:19-23; Acts 2:1-21

We have been looking closely at the Gospel of John through this series and in our Bible Study Group. Everything written, we learned, is so people would believe – that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, God the Son, and in Him only is life and peace and access to the presence of God the Father.

After the Passion and Resurrection of our Lord, things began to shift in focus to another God figure that would emerge - the Holy Spirit whom Jesus refers to as “another Comforter.” He is the Holy Spirit or the Spirit of Christ or the Spirit of God. We see all three members of the God-head represented by this one Spirit. He wasn’t sent to just hang out and make us feel good. He has a purpose and mission in us and through us. The Holy Spirit was sent upon people in the O.T. as well but not the same way as was about to happen in our text today.

READ: ACTS 2:1-21

Pentecost is not a N.T. event. It was a Hebrew feast of the O.T. for centuries. It occurs 50 days after the Passover (in the Christian perspective – 50 days after the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead). Originally, it was the Festival of First Fruits (Harvest) after the grain harvest. It was called the Feast of Weeks occurring seven weeks after the harvest when the first fruits of the annual harvest of barley were brought as a sacrifice to the Lord with thanksgiving (Notice that God always desires to be thanked). It was also considered the anniversary of the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai and annual renewal of the Mosaic Covenant. So, Pentecost was a long-standing holiday on the Jewish calendar.

The book of Acts is Part II of Luke’s Gospel, so we have to consider his approach to all this and what he said last in his first installment. **In Luke 24:45-49 – “Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”**

We see in John’s Gospel that the disciples were hiding in a room afraid of the Romans and the Jews. Jesus – resurrected – suddenly appears with them through the locked door. He says, **“As the Father has sent Me, even so I am sending you.”** He was sending them on a mission – this scared group of close

friends. Their Master, Teacher, Friend, Shepherd is not going to be with them as He has all along. ***And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."***

The Holy Spirit is given to the disciples by Jesus breathing Himself into them as the Comforter He had promised. They would receive the Holy Spirit in this way so wherever they go, Jesus would go with them. He in Spirit form would be their Comforter, Protector, preserver (a life preserver) in the world they were about to enter without Jesus physically with them and with a mission to carry out for God. As Spirit, He can be one with them. After Pentecost, Jesus, by His Spirit, can be one with all who believe and receive Him – BUT – we have to receive Him. Paul asked the disciples in Ephesus in Acts 19:1-3, ***"Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed?"*** They answer him that they didn't know there was a Holy Spirit. So, I ask you the same question as Paul, "Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed?"

The church overall is weak. This is due, in part, to many Christians in the church not taking their relationship with God to the next level – the second blessing – the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

D L Moody was once asked why he urged Christians to be filled constantly with the Holy Spirit. "Well," he said, "I need a continual infilling because I leak!" He pointed to a water tank which had sprung a leak. "I'm like that!" he said. It's a fact that living in this sinful world we do need to be replenished by the Spirit. A friend of mine, an evangelist, was asked if he believed in the "second blessing". "Of course I do," he replied, "and in the 3rd, 4th , 5th blessing, and so on."

Jesus was sending them to proclaim the Good News – the forgiveness of sin - if people would accept it. It is the same mission Jesus was sent on by the Father. So, just as He had the comfort and protection of the Father, the disciples would have the same benefits from Jesus Himself in Spirit form within them. This impartation of the Spirit by Jesus' breath is for life, essentially. Genesis – ***And God formed man from the dust of the earth and breathed into him the breath of life and man became a living being.*** Jesus breathed life into His disciples the same way. (Breath = Life).

This was one type of filling with the Holy Spirit that Jesus bestowed upon His disciples only, so they would have Him present with them as they faced the perils of the world before them. However, there was a bigger filling with the Holy Spirit waiting to be revealed to the world in general – to all who believe in Jesus Christ. This is the baptism in the fire and power of God.

The breath of Jesus into his disciples would become a mighty wind when they were all filled at Pentecost with the Holy Spirit's power. This was a baptism for a different purpose. They/We are filled with the power of the Holy Spirit to carry out the mission Jesus gave us – to take the message of the Gospel of salvation to the world around us.

Listen to what Luke writes: ***“All the believers were meeting together in one place. Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit...”***

This was an infilling for a different purpose. This was to empower them to evangelize the known world with the Good News of Jesus Christ the Messiah. Acts 1:8 – Jesus speaking – ***“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”***

This power was given to them so they would evangelize the world starting in Jerusalem, just as Luke said in Lk. 24 – that we read earlier. Beginning in Jerusalem and moving outward, they were to convert the world to Christianity. Jesus is the only means of salvation and forgiveness. God empowered them with the Holy Spirit, so they wouldn't have to try in their own strength to clean up their acts to be worthy of His calling. He called them first and empowered them to carry out His mission. He will take care of the clean-up detail in our lives.

In one of his meetings, D.L. Moody was explaining to his audience the truth that we cannot bring about spiritual changes in our lives by our own strength. He demonstrated the principal like this: "Tell me," he said to his audience, "how can I get the air out of the tumbler I have in my hand?" One man said, "Suck it out with a pump." But Moody replied, "That would create a vacuum and shatter it."

Finally after many suggestions, he picked up a pitcher and quietly filled the glass with water. "There," he said, "all the air is now removed." He then explained that victory for the child of God does not come solely by working hard to eliminate sinful habits, but rather by allowing Christ to take full possession."

Part of the Holy Spirit's work in our lives is to bring us through the process of sanctification. He will convict us of sinful ways and actions and help us to repent and become victorious. It is a process and will not happen overnight, but if we receive the power of the Holy Spirit into our lives, we will embark on an adventure with God to accomplish His will in and through our lives – lives changed by the living God by His Spirit.

Have you ever seen a pickle? What is it, really? A Cucumber? No, it is a baptized Cucumber!

1. When those cucumbers are put in that pickling jar and covered with the pickling juice and sealed, they are heated and stored for several weeks.

2. The effect of the juice on the cucumber changes it so much it gets a new name: the pickle. It has a new taste, a new texture, even a new feel. This happens because the juice changes the characteristics of the cucumber. Like the pickling juices the Holy Spirit works in our lives to change us into what God has in mind for each of us.

We have to be careful about moving out too soon. There is an important personal work that the Holy Spirit needs to do in each of our individual lives. Some of us are too quick to experience the Holy Spirit and then move out too soon into the ministry we think God has directed us to go. We find only hurt, pain, confusion and disappointment in this area. We have testified to an experience before we actually had one. J. Hudson Taylor said, ***“Do not have your concert first, and then tune your instrument afterward.”*** I can relate to that 😊 Pastor Bob Broadbooks wrote, ***“Un-tuned Christians can't produce beautiful music the world needs to hear. Un-tuned Christians have not been given the gift of truly speaking the language of the lost. Too often the church, stuck between Calvary and Pentecost, finds itself pacing ..., never truly experiencing the unleashable power of a true Pentecost in our lives.”***

When we look at the disciples who became the first Church, they waited as directed by Jesus, in an upper room and just prayed. They prayed for days. When was the last time you locked yourself away in a room and just prayed for days – for direction – for guidance – for the Lord to speak with you? This is one of the blessings of attending our Retreats each year. It's only for a weekend, but it's away from the noise and pace of our normal life – to focus on God and listen to His voice. We all would like a sensational Pentecostal experience like we read about today. If God would just speak to me that way, then I would be obedient and know it's God that's speaking to me. Elijah needed to hear from God in 1 Kings 19 – There came an violent wind, then an earthquake, then a fire, but God wasn't in all these sensational events. Then Elijah heard the ***“gentle small voice”*** of the Lord telling him what he needed.

Don't try to force God's hand in the way He will speak to you. He knows best when and how to do it specifically for you. We are all different and He knows us individually. **Just listen in prayer.**

We are not given the Holy Spirit and empowered to sit around together and proclaim how spiritual we are. We are given the Holy Spirit and empowered to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ to a lost and dying world. Many churches are sitting around enjoying the blessings of the Holy Spirit, but never moving outward to tell the world about Jesus. What a waste. God never intended the Holy Spirit to be given to church people so they could hang out and gloat about how they have the Spirit's power in their midst. We have a mission, and that is why the Holy Spirit is given to the body of Christ. We are to take the message that **Jesus is the Way and the Truth and the Life** to those who don't yet know.

The disciples were filled with and empowered by the Holy Spirit to take the Good News of Jesus Christ out into the world. They were sold out God, no matter what. They gave their hearts and their very lives to the Lord for His purposes. They met with severe persecution and oppression as a result. This Jesus thing was not very popular or acceptable in the political arena. So, the Scripture tells us of the 120 who were initially filled with Holy Spirit on that Pentecost day and the 3000 that were saved as a result of the preaching of the Gospel to the crowds. When the persecution hit, they all fled in fear. What do you think happened next? The Gospel then was preached everywhere they all fled to. The Gospel was and is still the truth of our salvation in Christ. So the Gospel advanced more during persecution than it has ever advanced in peaceful times. It is still the case today in the third world areas of heavy persecution against Christianity. Is everything going to be perfect in your life if you yield to the power and baptism of the Holy Spirit? NO! In fact – the opposite may happen, but it will be governed and directed by God for the advancement of the Gospel and His will through your life. He loves you and knows you.

As Christians we may be compared with a reservoir for producing electrical power, like one of those you see when you drive on vacation. When we accept Christ, construction of our reservoir is complete. We now have the potential to be useful and to affect lives. But until the flood gates are opened and the cascading river waters pour through, no power is realized. So it is when we are baptized in the Holy Spirit. We open our lives to God and the Holy Spirit pours into us and through us. It is then we become most effective in God's service.

As with the reservoir, this power-generating experience is not intended to be a one-time occurrence. It is to be an ongoing process. When our spiritual power runs low, we need to return to the Source and let the blessed Holy Spirit pour into us again, bringing fresh power.

There is no special day needed to be filled with the Holy Spirit, Thank God, but today is Pentecost Sunday. What a wonderful day to submit your life to God completely as an anniversary gift to the Lord.