

The God Who Empowers

Acts 1-2 July 18-19, 2015

Introduction

- Have you ever had the feeling that you were supposed to stop what you were doing and just pray for something or someone? Or maybe say something to someone, or go somewhere...just completely out of nowhere? Well, as I've continued to learn more about the Holy Spirit and how He directs and empowers us, I've experienced those sort of things happening more and more in my life and it's my hope today that every one of us can learn to experience God like this in ever increasing measure.
- The past couple weeks we've been studying how the Holy Spirit operates and we've been laying the critically important theological foundation of the Spirit's work in our lives.
- Today, we're going to be studying how the Holy Spirit empowers us to do the work God calls us to. As you turn with me to **Acts 1**, I'm going to pray.

The Baptism of the Spirit

- And we begin by looking at the baptism of the Spirit **PP** – a phrase that we need to make sure we understand since there's all kinds of misunderstanding surrounding it.
- **Acts 1:4-5** "And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.""
- This echoes what we read in each of the gospels where John the Baptist says **PP Mark 1:8** "I have baptized you with water, but he [Jesus] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." (see also **Matthew 3:11, Luke 3:16, and John 1:33**)
- In fact, we read in **John 14 and 16** about how Jesus told the apostles in the upper room all about the Holy Spirit and how God the Father had promised to send the Helper to them once Jesus ascended back to heaven.
- And ten days after Jesus's ascension we read about the fulfillment of that promise in **Acts 2:1-4 PP** "When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance."
- So we see that Pentecost is the fulfillment of the promise to Christ's disciples to be baptized by the Spirit.
- But what exactly happened at Pentecost? What is the baptism of the Spirit? I mean, after Jesus rose from the dead in **John 20:21-22 PP** "Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with

you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.””

- So didn't they already have the Spirit? Was this baptism of the Spirit some sort of second filling of the Spirit and should we as followers of Christ be seeking this same sort of second filling of the Spirit?
- The short answer is no. If I had the same theological understanding as certain denominations, I would say yes, we should all seek a second filling of the Spirit and I would call that second filling the baptism of the Spirit. But with all due respect to that theological position, I don't believe it accurately reflects the truth of scripture.
- No, in order to properly understand the baptism of the Spirit we need to understand how the Holy Spirit worked under the old covenant and how He works today under the new covenant.
- A key passage to understanding the difference is found in **John 14:16-17 PP** “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells *with* you and will be *in* you.”
- The critical portion we need to see is the last section of verse 17 – He, the Holy Spirit, dwells *with* you and will be *in* you. Under the old covenant – which was in effect until Jesus Christ rose from the dead and ascended into heaven – under that covenant the Holy Spirit dwelt *with* the children of God and could leave them – see King Saul as an example of this.
 - Today, when someone puts their faith in Christ because they recognize that none of us can save ourselves and only Jesus can save us *from* eternal hell, and *for* eternity in heaven. At the instant of genuine faith in Jesus, the Spirit of God indwells that person. And God will then move in them to live a life of joyful and thankful service bringing glory to His name until he calls them home. That's the gospel and that's the new covenant Christ's followers are under.
- Under the old covenant the Spirit was *with* a follower of God, **PP** but under the new covenant the Spirit is *in* all followers of Jesus.
- Pentecost was the initiation of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit under the new covenant. Thus, the promised baptism of the Spirit occurred the instant that the disciples were filled with the Spirit for the *first* time....not the *second* time.
 - In fact, we see similar Spirit baptism experiences with the Samaritans in **Acts 8**, the gentiles in **Acts 10**, and with Ephesian followers of John the Baptist **Acts 19**. Each of these instances of baptism of the Spirit were the initial indwelling of the Spirit in these believers.

- Does God still indwell us this same way today with these same manifestations of the Spirit? I believe the answer is yes. But it's not always present when He indwells a believer.
 - Might He empower a believer this way at some later point in the believer's life? Again, I believe the answer is yes – though it's not a second, greater filling as some claim.
- How do I know this? Turn over to **Acts 4:31**. This is after Peter was beaten and all the believers got together and prayed for boldness. **PP** “And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.”
- Was this a third filling of the disciples that gave them even greater power? No, it wasn't. It was simply God empowering His people to do the work He was calling them to do. Today, under the new covenant, *all* believers are baptized with the Spirit the instant we believe. **1 Corinthians 12:13** **PP** “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.”
 - Every one of us who believes has been baptized by the Spirit and we can continue to be empowered by the Spirit throughout our lives.
- But here's the trick, just because we who have put our faith in Jesus have been baptized by the Spirit it doesn't mean we're being empowered by the Spirit. I want to make sure we all hear that. A believer who has been baptized/indwelt by the Spirit doesn't automatically live a life empowered by the Spirit. And so now we turn our attention to the empowering of the Spirit. **PP**

The Empowering of the Spirit

- Back in **Acts 1**, before Jesus's ascension, we see the disciples talking with Christ about their impending reception of the Holy Spirit and what it meant for them. **Acts 1:6-8** “So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. 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.””
- I want us to notice right away that when Jesus began talking to the disciples about the promised Holy Spirit the first thing they wanted to know was if that meant they were finally going to be liberated from Roman rule.
 - And Jesus immediately set the record straight and basically said – stop worrying about that, stop focusing on what you want, and start seeking what the Lord wants for you.
- And this is the first step in being empowered by the Holy Spirit...we've got to stop seeking after our own desires and start seeking what the Lord wants for our lives. **PP** Our lives will

be powerless and devoid of the Spirit when all we're seeking after is what we want and give no thought or effort to what God is calling us.

- I hear people say, I just don't really see the Lord at work in my life...I don't see God's power in my life. Well, are you following after God's plan for you or are you after your own desires? Do you expect to see God move when all you care about is getting what you want and don't give a thought to what God is calling you to?
- When we shift our focus, and begin to seek after the things of the Lord, the power of the Holy Spirit will fill us to do whatever work the Lord is calling us to, wherever that may be – in our homes, our neighborhoods, our workplaces, the Lehigh Valley, the Congo, or anywhere else the Lord may lead us.
- The Greek word for “power” here **PP** (Gk. Dynamis) was used to describe the most powerful force known to the Greeks – the strongest thing in the universe.
- When you became a believer and were baptized with the Holy Spirit the instant you trusted Christ, you received the most powerful force in the universe. The same power that rose Christ from the dead, the same power that allowed the disciples to do amazing miracles; that's the same power available to us today.
 - There was nothing special about the apostles, or other disciples – they simply walked in the power of the Holy Spirit inside of them. We want to hold these people up as super spiritual examples of holiness – but their power came from the Spirit, the same Spirit we possess, but often fail to rely upon.
 - **A.W. Tozer said PP** “We may as well face it: the whole level of spirituality among us is low. We have measured ourselves by ourselves until the incentive to seek higher plateaus in the things of the Spirit is all but gone.... [We] have imitated the world, sought popular favor, manufactured delights to substitute for the joy of the Lord and produced a cheap and synthetic power to substitute for the power of the Holy Ghost.”
- So the question we need to ask ourselves is, are we walking in the power of the Spirit? Or, another way to ask it is, whose power am I relying upon?
 - Let me remind us of something – and I'm preaching this right to my own heart – we can do a lot of things successfully in our businesses, schools, and homes...make a lot of money, have a lot of influence, be admired by many people, help many who are in need, or preach a powerful sermon – but if we're doing any of that under our own power, then not only are we failing to live up to what the Lord is calling us to, but we're stealing the glory from God and keeping it for ourselves!
 - When I operate in my own power I only achieve Matthew sized results, not God sized results. But when I operate with the Holy Spirit energizing me, I

will achieve God sized results and God will be glorified, not me. **Zechariah**

4:6 “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.”

- There are those of us here that need to stop relying on our own strength and rely on the power of God. If that’s you, then wake up and recognize your sinful self-sufficiency, repent, and seek to rely on the power of the Spirit. We’ve got to see that our prideful self-reliance is robbing us of God’s power and we’ve got to humble ourselves before the Lord and learn to rely upon the power that He gives us.
 - Of course, at the opposite end of the spectrum, there are those of us here who feel powerless despite the fact that we are believers, and that’s just as wrong. We have the ultimate power in the universe living within us and if we would simply humble ourselves and yield to the Lord’s leading we would be witnesses to the Lord doing amazing things in us and through us.
- Like **Ephesians 5:18** says **PP** “do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit”
 - “Be filled” here **PP** (Gk. Plēroō, pronounced plā-ro'-ō) literally means to be filled to the brim, completely full. Figuratively, it means to take possession of and totally control
 - That’s what it means to be empowered by the Spirit...not to merely be baptized by Him and indwelt by Him, but to be totally and completely controlled by Him – filled to overflowing.
 - And I want us to see that Paul’s encouragement to us in this verse is a command (imperative mood); it’s a command for all believers (plural form); it’s a command that we need to seek God to do to us (passive voice, meaning we can’t fill ourselves); and it’s a command that never ceases (present tense), we are to seek to be further and further filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit as long as we remain here on Earth.
 - **John MacArthur** says, **PP** “If we do not obey this command, we cannot obey any other—simply because we cannot do any of God’s will apart from God’s Spirit. Outside of the command for unbelievers to trust in Christ for salvation, there is no more practical and necessary command in Scripture than the one for believers to be filled with the Spirit.”
- If we want to live empowered by the Spirit we’ve got to put aside our own preferences and desires, humble ourselves, and open ourselves up to the Spirit leading us and controlling as and guiding us. You can’t fill something that’s not open to being filled. And our prideful self-sufficiency or rebellious fear are some of the primary things that keep us from being filled.
 - Notice in **Acts 1** that the disciples spent 10 days praying, fasting, and waiting for the Spirit to indwell them. We should do the same thing. We should ask the Lord

every day to fill and empower us with the Spirit so that we don't rely on our own strength.

- But not only do we need to be open to the Spirit, **PP** we've also got to be vessels that aren't filled with other things. You can't fill something that's already full. If there are things in your life that are holding you back from fully yielding yourself to the Lord, then you will not be an empowered believer.
 - You may be a believer, but your life will lack the power of the Spirit. We've got to learn how to empty ourselves of all those distractions and idols that keep us from full submission to the control of the Spirit. And again, letting go of our selfishness and pride are key aspects of becoming a vessel fit to be empowered.
- I wish I could give you 5 easy steps to becoming an empowered believer in Christ, but scripture provides no such instructions. But I can describe to you what the empowered life looks like as you mature in your faith. It looks a lot like the life you're living now except with God's fingerprints all over it...things for us to testify and praise God about all the time.
 - When you open your eyes in the morning, I would encourage you to not just start your day in prayer (which I hope you already do), but that you specifically ask the Lord to fill and empower you with His Spirit that day.
 - And then, when you read your bible, don't just start reading, but ask the Spirit of God to open your heart and mind to the truth you need to be transformed by. The Spirit will lead you into that truth and not only help you understand what you're reading, but help you to apply it as well.
 - And as we go through our day, we've got to be mindful not to just rush headlong into things, but to constantly be listening for the guidance of the Spirit and asking for His power as we do whatever is set before us.
 - The more we learn how to rely on the empowerment of the Spirit, **PP** the more we'll operate outside of our comfort zone and the more God will be glorified in our lives...and you will hear Him speak to you more clearly than ever before.
 - You'll find him prompting you to pray for things you wouldn't typically pray for, say and do things you wouldn't typically say or do, go places you wouldn't normally go, think about things you'd never considered before, give up things that you formerly couldn't live without, overcome trials and tribulations that would have otherwise wrecked you, and you'll have an inner joy and thankfulness that should ooze out of you so that those around you notice that there's something different about you.
 - This doesn't mean life will be easy – in fact I would expect the enemy to attack you even more because you will become a greater threat to

him. But it does mean that your life will reflect the power within you and God will be glorified.

Conclusion

- Some of you know my brother Marcus PP and that he is a captain in the US Army. A couple years ago, Marcus was deployed to Afghanistan to the mountainous eastern border with Pakistan where the fighting with the Taliban rebels was the fiercest.
- One frigid winter day he was leading a sniper detachment from his company on a recon mission into Taliban territory. They trekked through the snow all morning to get to their targeted position up in the mountains so they could provide cover for the Green Beret unit that was clearing out caves in the valley below.
- As they settled into their position on the edge of the cliff face and focused on protecting the men below they were unaware of the Taliban insurgents sneaking up behind them who were taking up a position higher above them on a nearby mountaintop. These insurgents set up several automatic machine guns and targeted Marcus's men who were sitting ducks with no cover around them and on the edge of the cliff. And when the enemy was all set they opened fire with their automatic weapons sending thousands of rounds right at Marcus and his men.
- Well, that time zone is about 8 hours ahead of us here in the eastern time zone...and at just about that same time that he was being ambushed, the Spirit of the Lord woke several people up – at least 3 that I know about – and separately we began to pray for my brother's safety. The Spirit of the Lord put my brother on each of our hearts and instead of turning over in our beds and falling back asleep, we began to pray.
 - At the same time, my brother knowing he and his men were in trouble, asked the Lord for the strength, wisdom, and power to lead his men to victory and of course for the Lord to protect them.
 - I'll spare you the details of the remainder of the fighting, but when the dust settled, the insurgents were eliminated and not a single one of Marcus's men had been hit by the thousands of rounds that were aimed at them.
 - He said that every man there was amazed to see all the bullet holes in the snow that landed right next to where they tried to lay down and find cover. He said all the bullet holes basically made man-shaped Swiss cheese outlines around his men. All they could do was praise God for protecting them, and they never again went on a mission without first asking for the Lord's protection.
- Now, I'm not saying that the prayers of the people who woke up and prayed for Marcus were the sole cause of His deliverance....but I know the Spirit prompted each of us to pray, and when we were willing to follow the Spirit's leading, interrupt our sleep, and pray, Marcus and his men were saved, and, more importantly, God was glorified.

- That's just a small example **PP** of the things we can expect to see God do in our lives when we begin to seek the Spirit empowering us and leading us as we submit more and more to His control.
- We who have put our faith in Jesus have all been baptized by the Spirit. Brothers and sisters, by the grace of God let us live in the power of the Spirit, seeking to be filled every day, and relying on the ultimate power in the universe so that we may be witnesses to God's power in Easton, the Lehigh Valley, the United States, and to the ends of the Earth. Amen. Amen.