

The Missing Pieces - Acts 18:24 – 19:7

Before I get into the passage of scripture in Acts 18 and 19, I want to talk about four major ingredients that are present in the New Testament accounts of people coming to faith in Christ. Here are the four things:

- **Repenting of our sins toward God.**
- **Belief in the Lord Jesus.**
- **Baptism in water.**
- **Receiving the Holy Spirit.**

When John the Baptist was teaching out in the desert, he called people to repent from their sins, and to believe in Jesus. He called for people to be baptized, and he predicted a day when people would be baptized with the Holy Spirit. When Jesus preached, he preached repentance and faith. He practised baptism, and promised the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Apostles were commissioned to preach repentance, preach the gospel so that people would believe in Jesus as the Christ, and baptise them when they did. They did this in the power of the Holy Spirit, and they promised the Spirit's power to those who believed their message. In the book of Acts, we see this message being reinforced. In the book of Acts not every one of these four requirements is mentioned in every description of people coming to faith, but it's surprising how many of them are. Here is one example.

At the end of his sermon at Pentecost, Peter told the crowd ***“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38 NIV)*** Paul's encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road was the experience that caused him to turn his whole life around, after which he was baptised and was filled with the Holy Spirit. All four things happened when Peter preached the gospel to Cornelius' household. He preached about faith in Jesus and the forgiveness of sins. Then the Holy Spirit came upon them and he baptised them in the name of Jesus. In Acts 16, the Philippian jailer believed and was baptised, although there is no mention of him repenting or receiving the Holy Spirit.

It's pretty clear that when the Apostles preached the gospel, they wanted to preach the whole gospel and not just parts of it. They wanted to see people fully and thoroughly converted. They wanted people to understand what repentance toward God meant, and to see that repentance was real. They wanted people to understand what it meant to put their faith in Jesus. They wanted to be sure that when people were baptised, they understood that they were burying their old life with Christ and being raised to a new life with him. And they wanted these new converts to know the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives right from the beginning of their new life with Christ.

The Missing Pieces for Apollos.

Acts Chapter 18 and the first part of Chapter 19 describes two situations where some of the pieces were missing. In chapter 18 we are introduced to three people who were to be major players in the early church. Aquila, and his wife Priscilla, who worked making tents with Paul. The other major player was Apollos, a well educated Jew from Alexandria in North Africa. Acts 18 describes the first time Priscilla and Aquila met Apollos. Let's pick up the story from verse 24 of Acts 18

“Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervour and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately. When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers and sisters encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. When he arrived, he was a great help to those who by grace had

believed. For he vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah. (Acts 18:24-28 NIV)

There was no doubt that Apollos had come to faith in Christ, but Priscilla and Aquila saw there was a gap in his understanding and experience so they explained the way of God to him more adequately. The scriptures don't tell us what the gap was in his understanding, but it's a fair guess that he only knew of John the Baptist's baptism of repentance, and hadn't been baptised in the name of Jesus. As we shall see in a few minutes, that wasn't just a matter of whether Jesus' name had been used or not. John's baptism of repentance was a whole different deal than being baptised in the name of Jesus. There were some missing pieces in his understanding, and they wanted him to know and experience all that was involved in being a follower of Jesus.

The missing pieces for the 12 at Ephesus.

The same thing happened when Paul got to Ephesus. He met 12 men who were missing two of the dimensions of a full understanding of what it meant to follow Christ. They didn't know about baptism, and they didn't know about the Holy Spirit. I'm reading the first seven verses of Chapter 19.

“While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” They answered, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” So Paul asked, “Then what baptism did you receive?” “John’s baptism,” they replied. Paul said, “John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve men in all.” (Acts 19:1-7 NIV)

We could spend a long time this morning talking about speaking in tongues and prophecy, but I believe there is a far more important truth that comes out of these scriptures. For both Apollos, and for these 12 men at Ephesus, there were some missing pieces to their Christian life. They were like a car running on only half of its cylinders. They hadn't experienced all that God had for them. They hadn't been fully converted. Sadly, that's true for too many Christians today. They haven't been given the whole package, often because the person introducing them to Christ missed out some essential truths. So for the time we have left this morning, I want to ask you if there are some missing pieces in your understanding or experience that you need to address today. I want to address them in the form of four questions.

1. Have you repented of your sins toward God?

Without repentance, there can be no forgiveness of sins. Repentance is essential to Christian conversion. It's not simply feeling sorry for the fact that our sin has hurt others, or even feeling sorry about what our sinfulness has done to ourselves. Real repentance is when we begin to understand what effect our sin has had on God. When we begin to understand that we have defied God's authority, broken his laws, polluted his creation, spoiled his pleasure, made him angry, and deserved his judgement, then we are coming to an understanding of biblical repentance.

Repentance involves a deep conviction of past sins, then confession of past sins, and a correction of past sins. Repentance means doing a U-Turn and going in the opposite direction. Instead of walking away from what God wants for your life, you are now walking towards him. And that, my friends, takes a lifetime. Repentance isn't something you do once and then tick it off your list of things to do. Our problem as Christians is that we don't take repentance and sin seriously enough. We play with sin. We excuse it. We forget that God is a Holy God, who requires us to become like him. So I'm not asking if you prayed some prayer of repentance 10 years ago, or 50 years ago. I'm asking if you still feel that deep sense of conviction that you did when you first understood that Jesus died to cleanse you from your sin. Because if you do, you will still be saying “God be merciful to me, a sinner”. An alcoholic may not have

had a drink for 30 years, but when they have a true appreciation of their addiction, even after 30 years of being dry, they will still say to themselves “I’m an alcoholic”. For me. I’m a sinner. I’m turning from my sinful ways. My sin is covered by the blood of Christ, and I live in Gods abundant grace, but I’m a sinner. Do you really believe that and can you say that to God?

2. Do you believe in Jesus?

It’s easy to say we believe in Jesus, but just saying that doesn’t save us. It’s exercising the faith we have. Belief has to be possessed and practiced as well as spoken about. Too often people think that because they believe the historical facts about Jesus, they must be converted. Believing the facts about Jesus doesn’t make you a Christian. Even the demons believe in Jesus. Believing in Jesus means not only believing in the facts about Jesus, but believing in their significance. It’s making that faith personal. It’s trusting to the point of action. It’s speaking about that which you are believing in and acting on it. It’s living out what you believe. It’s keeping on in that belief. Saving faith, conversion faith, is not just a step, but a walk that takes a lifetime. So can you still say, “I believe in you Jesus?”

3. Have you been baptised in water?

Now if you are like me, you can probably tick that one off . I was baptised at age 15. But I’m not asking if you have been done, or dunked or whatever ceremony you went through. Baptism in the New Testament is a symbol of the burial of your old life and a resurrection to a whole new way of living. It’s a outward washing of the body that speaks of an inward washing of the soul. It’s a burial of the old life. It’s the funeral service of the old you. In the New Testament, repentance, belief in the Lord Jesus, and baptism all go together. Can you look back now and say “When I was baptised I was buried with Christ, and when I came up out of the water, I was raised from the grave to a new life in Christ, and that’s the life I’m living now.” Are you living in this new life you now have in Christ?

Those twelve men at Ephesus had been baptised into a baptism of repentance by John. But that was not enough. Baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus is a baptism into his life. It’s an identification with him in his death and resurrection. It one of the most powerful ways we can publically say “I belong to Jesus now”. Have you done that? Does your life now show that your old life is buried with Christ?

4. Have you received the Holy Spirit?

This is the element of power in conversion. I don’t believe in a second blessing theology where the baptism of the Spirit is presented as something that happens sometime after we become followers of Jesus. The power of the Spirit belongs at the beginning of the Christian life. Being filled with the Spirit belongs as part of the conversion process, not some remote experience set as a target for excellent Christians. Look at Acts Chapter 2:38 & 39. Peter, who was himself filled with the Spirit, promised the same experience to all who heard his words, to all who believe the message of Jesus, to all who were baptised. He said ***“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call.”***

God doesn’t want his children to struggle on for years, trying hard to please him. He wants them to start in the power of the Holy Spirit, and continue in the power of the Spirit, being filled over and over again. I wish someone had taught me this, rather than wandering along as a Christian for years not knowing the Spirits power. Why do we have so many weak and ineffectual Christians? I suspect it’s because no one has ever introduced them to the power of the Spirit right back when they repented, trusted Christ and were baptised. Unless you know the power of the Spirit you are missing out on the power to be able to live for Christ. One of the reasons why some have missed out on this power is because we have got so hung up on the term baptism in the Spirit. But that’s only one way the work of the Spirit is described in the New Testament.

Receiving the Holy Spirit is such a powerful experience for believers, that the New Testament writers have ransacked the dictionary searching for words to describe the person and work of the Spirit. He is described as the Spirit of promise. On the day Pentecost, Peter reminded people that this is what God had promised through the prophet Joel hundreds of years before. He is described in terms of a Gift. He cannot be earned, bargained for, or worked for. He can only be received with gratitude. He is described as a Deposit. He is the first down payment on much more to follow. That's the great thing about what happens. We receive the Spirit, but then we go on being filled to overflowing. God is not reluctant to give. He abundantly blesses us with the Spirit. The work of the Spirit is described as Renewal. Renewal is returning something to its original condition. That's what the Spirit of God does in us. He restores the image of God in us to what God intended us to be. His work is described as a Baptism. To be baptised in the Holy Spirit is to be immersed, plunged, drenched, sunk in the Spirit. Years ago an old Baptist Pastor said to me, that the problem with many Baptists is that when it comes to water baptism we are all for immersion, and when it comes to baptism in the Spirit, we are all for sprinkling. His work is described as a Filling. Ephesians 5:18 says, "Go on being filled with the Spirit." It's an on-going experience of his power. No matter what you have known of the Spirit's power, God has so much more for you. The New Testament talks about Drinking of the Spirit. It's a picture of cool, clear, pure, crystal water, flowing in abundance into the lives of thirsty people. The New Testament uses the words "Fall upon or Poured out upon", to describe the way the Spirit is poured out over needy people. It talks about being Sealed by the Spirit, as God's mark of ownership on our lives. Sealing in the New Testament is a picture of an owner who chooses not to pick up something he has purchased, so he seals that property with sealing wax and his own stamp, to show it belongs to him, and that he will come back to collect it later. God seals us with his Spirit to show everyone that we belong to Him, and that He is coming back for us. And the scripture speaks of the Spirit Anointing. It's an image of anointing oil, poured out for blessing on the lives of believers. Can you see now what a rich and powerful thing it is to receive the Spirit? All of these images point to an experience of the power of the Spirit, not just an intellectual understanding of his Person.

As I have prepared this message this week I have felt the Lord prompt me to issue an invitation to everyone here. This is for me as well as you. I want to give each of us here an opportunity to either affirm these four truths for the first time, or to reaffirm them. It may be that you have never repented of your sins before God, or you have never declared that you believe in Jesus. It may be that you have never been baptised and buried your old life with Christ, or received the Holy Spirit. In a moment I'm going to give you the opportunity to do that publically by standing to your feet. If you can't stand, you can raise your hand.

But for those of us who made these declarations at some time in the past, I want to give you the opportunity to reaffirm them. By standing to your feet, or by raising your hand, you can declare publically "I'm a repentant sinner." "I continue to believe in Jesus". "My old life has been buried with Christ in baptism and I'm now living a new life". "I want to continue to live for Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit".

This is not for the benefit of anyone watching. This is between you and God. I'm going to pray, and then invite all of you that want to, to stand.

Prayer