

Receive The Holy Spirit

A couple of years ago Lyn and I, along with two friends, biked down the Danube river through Austria, Slovakia and Hungary. We averaged about 45 kilometres a day, which for unfit geriatrics like us, was about enough. I realise that for some of you, 45 kilometres on a bike is just a bit of a warm up. When we came to a hill we were really having to work hard, even though we had up to 21 gears to choose from. But here's the bit that got me. We would be puffing and pushing our way up the hills, and all the people on electric bikes would just cruise past us without even raising a sweat. Riding an ordinary bike uphill and riding an electric bike is a whole different deal. Following Jesus without the power and presence of the Holy Spirit is like riding a bike uphill without any gears at all.

The power and presence of the Holy Spirit makes following Jesus possible. Following Jesus is about living life in the supernatural realm. To do that we need supernatural power and a supernatural presence. That's where the Holy Spirit comes in. Receiving the Holy Spirit is the fourth essential ingredient if we are to become followers of Jesus.

1. Is there something missing?

As the Apostle Paul moved around the churches in what is now Turkey, he met people who were followers of Jesus. When he arrived at the city of Ephesus, he found a group of followers who had obviously believed in Jesus, and who had experienced John's baptism of repentance. But they hadn't been baptised as believers in Jesus, and they didn't know anything about the Holy Spirit. Paul realised there were some big gaps in their understanding and experience so he asked them some questions. Here is how the book of Acts describes the encounter between Paul and these men at Ephesus.

"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)

Paul was keen that they understand and experience the missing dimensions of their faith. So he baptised them in the name of Jesus, and laid hands on them to receive the Holy Spirit. When he did, their lives began to overflow with the Holy Spirit. It was as though their lives had been like an engine that was only running on two of four cylinders. They didn't know about the power of baptism that identifies with the death and resurrection of Jesus, and they didn't know about the power of the Holy Spirit that would enable them to live as lifelong followers.

The pattern of faith in the early church was so well established, that when Paul found someone who hadn't understood and experienced repentance toward God, faith in Jesus Christ, baptism as a believer, and the fullness of the Holy Spirit, he was keen to make sure they received all that God had for them. When any of those elements were missing, he made sure people knew about them. So today, we are going to look at what it means to receive the Holy Spirit, which is another of these fundamental truths that belong at the beginning of the Christian life, when we first become followers of Jesus.

2. Receiving the Spirit's power.

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. Too often Christians have argued about whether it's the baptism of the Spirit or the filling of the Spirit. But the New Testament is full of rich words that describe the person and work of the Spirit. He is described as the Spirit of promise. When the church first got started there was a festival in Jerusalem called Pentecost. The Holy Spirit came down upon those first followers and they began to praise God in languages they had never learned. The crowd of onlookers, who were from all over the world, were amazed, because they heard these Jesus people speaking their

language. Some of the onlookers thought they were drunk. The Apostle Peter said “no, they are not drunk. God promised that he would pour out his Spirit on all people. This is what God promised.”

The Holy Spirit is described in terms of a Gift. You can't earn a gift. You can't work for a gift. All you can do is receive it with gratitude. The Holy Spirit is described as a Deposit. He is the first down payment on much more to follow. Do you realise that? Whatever you know of the Holy Spirit in your life now, it's only a small part of all that is to come. That's the great thing about what happens. We receive the Spirit, but then we go on being filled to overflowing. 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. When I first started out as a Baptist Pastor at the tender age of 29 I met with an old, retired Baptist Pastor who was probably about the age I am now. He said to me, “You know David, 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.” I don't want to be sprinkled in the Spirit. I want to be baptised in the Spirit. I want everything God has for me. Don't you?

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. The evangelist DL Moody was once asked why he believed in many fillings of the Spirit. He said “Because I leak.” 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. This is a great picture. In the days when the New Testament was written, when a person purchased something that they intended to come back for later, they would put their personal seal or mark, in wax, on that object. That wax seal, with the owners mark, said to everyone “Don't touch. This is mine. I've paid full price for it and I'm coming back for it”. That's what the Holy Spirit does with us. When we belong to God, he seals us with his Spirit. His mark on us says “Don't touch. I'm coming back to collect what I have paid for with the blood of my son Jesus”. Isn't that cool? The scripture speaks of the Spirits 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 and presence of the Spirit, not just an intellectual understanding of his Person. Rather than using one or two words like baptism or filling to describe the work of the Spirit, let's use them all.

3. Overflowing with the Spirit.

When people receive the Spirit – when they are anointed, sealed, drink deeply, are filled, are baptised, are renewed with the Spirit – they just overflow. I tell you, I did. My experience was a bit like the disciples at Ephesus. I had been a Christian for many years and had never really heard teaching about what the Holy Spirit wanted to do in my life. The way the Bible was taught in my church, you could be forgiven for thinking that we believed in the Father, The Son and the Holy Scriptures. It wasn't until I was training for ministry at that I began to see a spiritual dynamic in the lives of other people that I knew I didn't know in my own experience. There was no doubt I was a born again Christian. I knew about the person of the Spirit, but I didn't know his power. These people I was mixing with had a power in their lives that I hadn't experienced. Their lives made me spiritually thirsty. I began to read all I could, and ask them questions about the Holy Spirit. But at the same time I had all these barriers about the work of the Spirit. I was scared that if I experienced the Spirit's power I would become a raving Pentecostal. Raving Pentecostals rolled on the floor, foamed at the mouth and swung from the chandeliers! I didn't actually know any raving Pentecostals, and I'd never seen one close up, but I'd certainly heard plenty of horror stories! Do you know the way it is?

One afternoon in a prayer meeting, some friends prayed for me, laid hands on my head, and asked the Holy Spirit to come upon me. The Spirit of God touched me in such a way that I just bubbled over and I couldn't hold it in. That night, Lyn could see that something had happened, and in fact that made her all the more thirsty. About two or three days later she asked me to pray for her that she would know the same thing. Over the weeks and months that followed I had a number

of people who knew me well who, without any prompting, told me that they could see a difference in me. They said there was a new power and purpose in my preaching.

What a tragedy that I had to wait about ten years after repenting of my sins, believing in Jesus, and being baptised before I really knew the overflowing power of the Spirit. I had been so tied up with arguments about whether it was baptism or filling, whether it was something that happened at conversion or whether it was a second blessing, whether it was something that had happened already that I wasn't aware of. Sometimes we get so tied up with all the finer points of theology, we miss the dynamic of the power of the Spirit in our lives.

Receiving the Spirit in power should happen when we first follow Jesus. The Holy Spirit was given in Acts Chapter 2, not Acts Chapter 28. The power of the Spirit is given at the beginning of our life with Jesus so that we can live the Christian life in His power, not struggling along on our own. Repentance, belief in the Lord Jesus, burial and resurrection in baptism and the power of the Spirit all go together. Being sunk in the Spirit, filled with the Spirit, sealed by the Spirit, anointed with the Spirit, renewed by the Spirit – all that belongs when we first start following Jesus.

4. What stops us receiving the Spirit's power?

- **Sin.**

If there are specific sins in our lives that we won't let go of and we won't confess, then the Holy Spirit is blocked from doing his work. He is the Holy Spirit. Holiness cannot abide uncleanness. If I have a choice of a dirty glass on the kitchen bench and a clean one in the cupboard, guess which one I'm going to use if I want to fill it to overflowing with pure, fresh water? The Holy Spirit won't fill a dirty vessel. He won't come and live in a life that's dirty.

- **Unbelief.**

Unbelief blocks the work of the Spirit. Receiving the Spirit's power is an act of faith. If unbelief says that nothing will change in our lives, then nothing will change. The power of the Spirit is given to us so that we can be made into the image of Christ. If we don't want to be made more like Christ, why would he want to fill us?

- **Fear.**

This was a barrier for me. My question was "If I open up my life to the work of the Spirit, what will he do in me? Will I become one of those wild and crazy Christians who do all sorts of irrational stuff? I don't want to do weird." Here is a verse of scripture that helped me so much. "***Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!***" (Luke 11:11 NIV) God is a father who loves us and wants to give good gifts to his children. He is not going to give us something that will harm us. He loves us.

5. The Overflow of the Spirit.

When we are full of the Spirit, there is an overflow from the mouth. Actually whatever a person is full of will overflow out of that person's mouth. Some Christians have said that speaking in tongues is the only evidence of the fullness of the Spirit. But to insist on tongues as being the only evidence is to take a work of grace, and make a law out of it. Speaking in tongues is one evidence that a person is full of the Spirit, but not the only one. When a person is full of the Spirit, they begin to overflow in all sorts of ways. It may be in songs and praise. It may be in a new confidence in talking about Jesus. It may be the spiritual gift of tongues. It may be in prophecy where we are speaking words that God gives us to other people. It may be that like Stephen, who was full of the Holy Spirit, we find a boldness in declaring Christ that we never knew before. When the Spirit has done his work in our hearts and has filled us with his power, that power overflows from our life to others. The Spirit of God is too big to be contained in us. When we are full, we overflow. Whatever our heart is full of, that's what will overflow out of our mouth. Whenever the Spirit is present in power there will be outward manifestations that become obvious to those around.

Listen to this scripture.

"On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." By this he meant the Spirit, whom those

who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.” (John 7:37-39 NIV)

As I have done for the last three Sundays, there will be opportunity for those who would like prayer. There may be some people here today who have never repented of their sins and believed in Jesus. If you need to do that, and you would like someone to pray with you, I invite you to come for prayer. It may be that you know the Lord wants you to be baptised, and you need to be obedient to what the Spirit is saying to you. You can come for prayer if you want to. It may be there are some people here today who have repented, believed in Jesus and been baptised, but you have never known the overflowing power of the Spirit in the way that God intended you to live. If you would like prayer today you can come. Perhaps there are some here today who have received the Spirit's power in the past, but you have allowed sin to take the place of the Spirit, and you need to confess that sin, be cleansed and forgiven. You need the Spirit of God to fill you again so that you overflow as you once did. If you would like prayer, there are people available today who will pray with you.

God wants you to receive all that he has for you. Take the opportunity he gives you today and welcome what he is offering.