



LIFE IN THE SPIRIT: UPON YOU

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Last weekend I spoke of our relationship with the Holy Spirit, using terms that Jesus gave us: “with you” and “in you.”

Until a person chooses to follow Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit is “with” him or her to draw them to Christ and show them their need of salvation. It is the Holy Spirit who introduces us to Christ and enables us to put our faith in Him.

In this respect, the Holy Spirit is *with* every human being, and everyone is on a journey toward Christ. The Spirit uses every circumstance and all our personal choices to make Christ real and desirable.

The moment we entrust ourselves to Christ for salvation, a new relationship begins. We receive complete forgiveness from God. The barrier that stood between us and God is removed and fellowship is established, as the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within us.

He’s not renting, and He’s not leasing; God bought us with a great price and we are His. The Holy Spirit comes to stay. And we become the adopted sons and daughters of the Living God. There is no status on earth that can compare with that!

“You received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:15-17).

“Abba” means papa. The Holy Spirit’s presence within us brings us into closest intimacy with God, sharing the same kind of fellowship that Jesus shares with the Father. This is what it means to be “born again.”

Birth, however, is not the climax of relationship, but the beginning. There is still more! Jesus said:

*“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes **upon you**. And you will be My witnesses, telling people about Me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).*

He was describing a third dimension of relationship with the Holy Spirit.

Upon You

Jesus Himself enjoyed this vital fellowship with the Holy Spirit. His disciple, Matthew, who wrote one of the Gospel accounts, pointed out that Jesus fulfilled one of Isaiah's prophecies concerning the Messiah, as He ministered to the crowds who sought His help. Matthew quoted from Isaiah 42:

¹⁸ *"Look at My Servant, whom I have chosen.*

He is My Beloved, who pleases Me.

I will put My Spirit upon Him,

and He will proclaim justice to the nations.

(Mat 12:18)

The Holy Spirit was *upon Him*. How did that happen? When did it begin?

When the angel Gabriel announced to Mary the plans that God had for her life, and she wondered at how God would bring it to pass:

*The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come **upon you**, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be holy; He will be called the Son of God.*

(Luke 1:35)

Jesus, uniquely, was filled with the Holy Spirit from His conception. But how could we perceive such a thing? We could not, except by revelation. So, to make this point in a way that we could recognize,

*"When all the people were baptized (by John in the Jordan River), Jesus also was baptized. And while He was praying, the heavens opened, and the Holy Spirit descended **upon Him** in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my one dear Son; in You I take great delight." (Luke 3:21-22)*

Then Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan River. (Luke 4:1)

This coming of the Holy Spirit upon Him launched His ministry of introducing the Kingdom of God through teaching and miracles.

Peter testified:

"You know that God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. Then Jesus went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him." (Acts 10:38)

And Jesus said of His disciples (which includes many of us):

⁸ *You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.*” (Acts 1:8)

Now, “filled” is filled, and generally, no more can be added. But Jesus’ capacity and my capacity are not the same.

Nevertheless, the Father promised to fill us with the same Holy Spirit. Under the First Covenant (the Old Testament) that only happened occasionally and temporarily—to specific people, at specific times, for specific tasks (think of Gideon or Samson or Saul). But under the New Covenant, it is to be universal and permanent, as it was on the Day of Pentecost reported in Acts 2.

Pentecost

¹ *When the day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all together in one place.*

² *And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.*

³ *And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them.*

⁴ *And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.*

Four significant things happened in those four verses—and I’m not referring to the signs and wonders of that occasion. There were four *elements of fullness*.

Verse 1: the Day of Pentecost had fully come. Pentecost was a harvest festival that God instructed the Jewish people to celebrate at the time of the year’s early harvest, when spring turned to summer. But, like all of the festivals and rituals God prescribed, Pentecost bore a prophetic element—a greater fulfillment of purpose, yet to be revealed. This was that.

Verse 2: the sound of a windstorm filled the whole house. No corner of the house was left in silence. The sound of the Spirit’s arrival was everywhere, touching every ear, filling everyone’s consciousness. Just so, the message of the Spirit’s fullness, which we carry, is for everyone in the house—every Christian, every Christ-follower.

Verse 3: flames of fire rested on each one of them. The Spirit’s fiery presence comes to refine each of God’s children. God loves you so much that He receives you *just as you are*—there’s no behavior you need to change before you can receive the Father’s embrace and the Savior’s love or the Spirit’s power. But God loves you too much to leave you just as you are. You will become holy “as He is holy.” This is accomplished not by trying harder, but by trusting more. He is the flame; He is the Refiner—for all of His people.

Verse 4: they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. No one was overlooked. No one was excluded. Everyone was a candidate. And everyone received. This was an example of God's plan for these last days—that ALL of His children should be filled with the Spirit.

All of His children DO have the Spirit IN them, or else, as Paul wrote:

“Those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them do not belong to Him at all.” (Romans 8:9)

But each of us has the capacity for MORE. If you have an elastic container like a rubber balloon, capacity can increase. And, unless you become rigid and inflexible, each of us is such an elastic, expandable container, whom God stretches through trials and challenges and opportunities, to receive more from the Lord, and to do more in His name.

*⁶And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue His work **until it is finally finished** on the day when Christ Jesus returns.* (Php 1:5-6)

Today, we celebrate that awesome Day of Pentecost, when all of the disciples of Jesus were filled with the Holy Spirit, and 3,000 souls were converted and baptized in Jesus' name. But this is more than a holiday for the Church; it is the reminder of a daily discipline—waiting prayerfully and receiving greater fullness of the Spirit.

Jesus said we would receive power—God's power—power to live as He wants us to, power to love as He has loved us—everyday. Not according to your feelings, but according to God's power! Not according to your own strength, but according to God's.

We have been called and equipped by the fullness of the Holy Spirit, so that we are no longer limited to living by self-effort. Trying harder is self-defeating. Trusting Christ is liberating and life-giving. The baptism with the Holy Spirit is the equipping we need.

Don't rely on God to do what you can do for yourself; but, don't rely on yourself (or others) to do what only God can do for you.

Harvest Time

Pentecost was a harvest celebration—chosen to remind us that, with the Holy Spirit upon us, it is always harvest time!

The power of the Holy Spirit which Jesus has given us is not only power to live in love and faithfulness, but also power to bring to others effective witness of who Jesus is and what He has done, whether that is by telling the story with words, or demonstrating the results with acts of supernatural power.

When His disciples wondered about the coming Kingdom and its impact, Jesus told them: *“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 farthest parts of the earth.”* (Acts 1:8)

I have learned that this passage uses a verb construction unique to the original language (Greek), in which the two passive verbs (“receive power” and “be My witnesses”) linked by a conjunction (“and”) describe a linked function—that is, each action described leads to the other and amplifies the other.

In other words, if you experience a surge of God’s power, it is aimed at your bearing witness—that is its purpose. Or, if you bear witness of Christ, that will invoke His power, for that is its effective source. It matters not which one comes first—the power or the witness—each will invoke the other!

For example, on some occasion, you may feel empowered of the Lord—that is not for you simply to enjoy; it is for your service—expect to employ it in an opportunity to witness for Jesus.

On the other hand, when you find yourself standing before an open door of witness, do not hesitate because you have not first *felt* the empowerment of the Holy Spirit—as you begin to bear witness the power will come. They always work together.

Prepare Yourself

What is required in order to be baptized (for the first time) or subsequently filled with the Holy Spirit? Only 2 things.

First, we need to surrender. Have you surrendered your will to the Lord Jesus? Because you cannot remain the boss of your life, if He is Lord. Apostle Paul described this as becoming “a living sacrifice” (Romans 12:1):

“And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all He has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind He will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship Him.”

As you may surmise, the usual problem with a living sacrifice is that it resists the process and keeps crawling off the altar. Therefore, surrendering your will is not a once-and-done procedure. You cannot be filled with the Holy Spirit if you are still full of yourself. Each time you recognize that you lack what is needed, surrender is the first step.

Second, we need to trust. The baptism with the Holy Spirit and the accompanying empowerment are gifts from God. They are not badges of moral superiority or spiritual achievement.

One faithfully devoted brother in our church had been delivered from his old way of living, but could not shake the habit of smoking. Since his body was now the Temple of the Holy Spirit, he reasonably concluded that Jesus would not baptize Him in the Spirit until he had conquered that habit.

When I learned this, I said to him, “The baptism with the Holy Spirit is a gift, not a reward. Jesus doesn’t give the Holy Spirit because you have quit your bad habits by your own effort; He gives the Holy Spirit so that you *can* quit those stubborn habits by His help. By God’s grace, he was able to hear that and relented of self-effort and trusted the Lord Jesus. He was baptized in the Spirit on the spot and, a month later, was nicotine-free.

Surrender and trust and you will receive the blessed baptism with the Holy Spirit. God the Father has already released it, after Jesus was glorified in Heaven, and Jesus has promised it to those who believe and receive.

It is harvest time, my friends! In the midst of these calamitous days, people’s hearts are open to the message of Christ, more than ever before. Don’t wait for another tectonic shift in circumstance; take the path that is already before you and be a witness for Jesus Christ. *“As you are going...”*

Be humble, be authentic, and be bold. Tell how Jesus’ story has intersected with yours. Let others know that you weren’t born with faith, but when your heart turned toward the Lord, He gave you faith to light the way for you.

Just as Paul wrote to the church in Corinth:

Yes, even today when [the Jews] read Moses’ writings, their hearts are covered with that veil, and they do not understand. But whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. (2 Corinthians 3:15-17)

What About Tongues?

On the Day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2, *“everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.” (Acts 2:4)*

Some time later, the Spirit directed Peter to preach the Good News to a Gentile household, and God’s acceptance of their faith was demonstrated as *“the Holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening to the message. The Jewish believers who came with Peter were amazed that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles, too. For **they heard them speaking in other tongues and praising God.**”*

*Then Peter asked, “Can anyone object to their being baptized, now that they have received the Holy Spirit **just as we did?**” (Acts 10:44-47)*

Speaking in tongues quickly became the telltale sign of the baptism with the Holy Spirit. It was not the only sign that appeared, but it was the common denominator—the initial physical evidence—that answers the question, “How can I know for sure that I have received the baptism with the Holy Spirit like the first disciples did?”

Speaking in tongues means vocalizing a language you have not learned, and may never have heard before. It is not simply a verbal reaction to the Spirit coming upon you, like an involuntary shout when you touch a live wire or a hot stove; it is an expression of the Holy Spirit from within you. It is the Spirit’s communication to the Father, in a language they understand, through you, though you do not understand what you’re saying.

No longer confined to the words your intellect can devise, or restricted to the expressions with which you’re familiar. This is communicating your love and worship on God’s level, from your heart to His, bypassing the bottleneck of your limited understanding and linguistic ability.

How is this possible? Only God understands the mechanics. You just gather up your love and praise for the Lord, and permit the Holy Spirit to use your vocal chords, your tongue, and your lips to express it in unfamiliar syllables and sequences.

Won’t that feel awkward? Yes. But if awkwardness can halt your obedient response to the Holy Spirit, there won’t be much you can achieve for the Lord in your life. Get over it. Learn to do the awkward things the Lord asks of you, beyond your familiar comfort zone, in response to the promptings of the Lord. You won’t regret it. And His grace allows room for mistakes.

This is what it means to live in the fullness of the Spirit.

As Isaiah predicted (Isaiah 60:1-3):

¹ *“Arise, shine; for your light has come,
And the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.*

² *“For behold, darkness will cover the earth
And deep darkness the peoples;
But the Lord will rise upon you*

And His glory will appear upon you.

³ *“Nations will come to your light,
And kings to the brightness of your rising.*

For such a time as this...