

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (27-3-1994 Guisborough Evangelical Church)

## The Gift of the Holy Spirit

Acts 2:1-4

Additional Bible Reading: Acts 1:5,8; 2:1-11,38-41

### Introduction

Our Bible reading recounts the events of the Day of Pentecost. Pentecost fell in the middle of three Jewish harvest festivals. They had celebrated the completion of the grain harvest, and the Passover. Pentecost was on the fiftieth day after that. In the inter-testament period, this day was observed as the anniversary of the giving of the Law at Sinai.

All the disciples had gathered together seven weeks after Passover, when Jesus had been crucified. In a remarkable way, the Holy Spirit came on them. His coming was accompanied by three supernatural signs – sound (**like the blowing of a violent wind**), sight (**what seemed to be tongues of fire came to rest on each of them**), and strange speech (**all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages**).

There were many Jews from various parts of the Roman world in Jerusalem at that time. Travelling was safest at the end of May and beginning of June, so more came to Jerusalem at this time than at Passover. They heard the disciples preach the wonderful works of God in their own native languages - though the speakers were Galileans who were notoriously uncultured. Hence the dramatic reversal of “cursest Babel”. On that occasion, human languages became confused and nations were scattered. At Pentecost the language barrier was overcome. A sign of unity of men from different nations in Christ. Reminder that in heaven the redeemed company will include men from every nation, tribe and people language. The church is multi-racial and multi-lingual.

Today we are going to answer some common questions currently asked about the Holy Spirit.

### What happened at the Day of Pentecost?

This was the final act of the saving work of Jesus. He was born in our humanity, died for our sins, rose from the dead, ascended to the Father’s right hand, and finally sent His Spirit to His people to constitute them as the body of Christ. So Pentecost – the giving of the Holy Spirit to the Church – is unrepeatable. His coming was the fulfilment of prophecy to Joel (Joel 2:28-32), and was promised by Jesus in the Upper Room. He promised to send the Holy Spirit after He had ascended, to teach, remind and guide them.

So the Holy Spirit came to equip the early church to be His witnesses in the primary sense. And because the Holy Spirit’s ministry continues, He also equips every generation. The fullness of the Holy Spirit is for all. The Holy Spirit was active in Old Testament days. Believers were regenerate, but He came on special people for special work at special times. However, at Pentecost, His ministry became wider and deeper. All believers may know His fullness. He indwells believers in a way in which Old

Testament believers never knew. His ministry is especially related to Christ. He reveals Christ and forms Christ in the people of God of the new covenant.

The era of the Holy Spirit was inaugurated at Pentecost. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is absolutely crucial to the individual and to the church. He gives spiritual life, i.e. new birth, understanding of Christian truth, He enables Christians to live a Christian life, He is essential for worship and prayer and witness, He constitutes the life and fellowship of the Church.

Just as a body without breath is a corpse, so the Church without the Spirit is dead. We neglect the doctrine of the Holy Spirit at our peril. Here is the secret of spiritual life, true worship, heartfelt prayer, effective witness, true fellowship, and authentic Christian character.

### What is the baptism of the Holy Spirit?

In the early chapters of Acts, Luke uses several terms to describe the coming of the Holy Spirit on the disciples at Pentecost. **You shall be baptised** (Acts 1:5). **You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you** (Acts 1:8). **All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit** (Acts 2:4). **You will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit** (Acts 2:38). **The promised Holy Spirit... The promise is for you** (Acts 2:33,39, c.f. Luke 24:49), **I will pour out my Spirit** (Acts 2:17). These terms are many and interchangeable. But the reality of the Holy Spirit is one.

On the occasion of Cornelius's conversion, **The Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning... God gave them the same gift as he gave us** (Acts 11:15-19). According to the New Testament, all Christians have been baptised by the Holy Spirit, else they are not Christians. **For we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body** (1 Corinthians 12:13). We are made members of Christ's body by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. As a result, we are now in Christ, new creatures in Christ.

There is no suggestion that this comes some time after conversion. It happens at conversion; else we would not be Christians. No one is told, as an answer to the problems in the church, to seek the baptism of the Spirit once they are Christians, as a later experience. We are baptised already with the Holy Spirit, we have already been given the Holy Spirit, we have already received the Holy Spirit. He has taken up residence, made our body His temple, imparted new life, causing us to grow, uniting us to the body of Christ, the Church. He is already at work equipping us to serve and witness. He is our pledge and foretaste of heaven. From the very beginning until the end of our Christian lives, we are utterly dependent on Him.

He is one of the two great gifts from the Lord. He takes away our sin, because He is the Lamb of God (John 1:29), and He baptises us with the Holy Spirit (John 1:33). Cleansing and baptising are the two great gifts of Christ, the two major blessings of the new covenant. Forgiveness of sins, and spiritual life by the Holy Spirit. The Gospel is not just negative – the reverse of guilt, sin and wrath. It is also positive – the Holy Spirit, who regenerates, indwells, liberates and transforms.

### Were there not two stages in the experience of the Apostles?

It is often pointed out that the Apostles were regenerate and believers, yet they needed to be baptised by the Holy Spirit. So is it not to be assumed that baptism of the Holy Spirit is a second experience for us?

Note that there were two companies of people in Acts 2. There were the 120 disciples at the beginning of the chapter, who heard the sound of the wind and saw the fire. And there were the 3000 at the end of the chapter who had evidently obeyed Peter's evangelistic message and received forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. They signified this in their baptism. The difference is that the 120 were regenerate already, and then baptised by the Holy Spirit, and the 3000 were unbelievers who received the Holy Spirit at their conversion. There is no mention of them seeing the wind and fire and speaking in strange tongues.

The norm for us is the experience of the 3000, not that of the 120. The 120 did have the 2-stage experience because of historical circumstances – they could not have received the Pentecostal gift before Pentecost. These 120 straddled the two dispensations (the Old Testament believers before Pentecost, and full New Testament believers after Pentecost) and are therefore unique. But these historical circumstances no longer exist. Like the 3000, we all live after Pentecost. The full gift of the Holy Spirit has been given, and with the 3000 we receive forgiveness and the baptism of the Holy Spirit together at conversion. The blessings of Pentecost are for all who are in Christ, who receive forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit when they repent and believe.

### But what of the Samaritans and Ephesian disciples?

In Acts 8:5-17, Philip preaches the Gospel in Samaria. Many believed. News got to Jerusalem. So the church sent out Peter and John. They laid hands on the Samaritan believers, and they received the Holy Spirit. Were there not two distinct stages there?

Indeed the Samaritans were a special case. This was the first time the Gospel was preached outside Jerusalem. These converts were Samaritans. There had been bitter rivalry between Jews and Samaritans for centuries. The Jews would have wondered if the Samaritans were genuine believers and whether they would be acceptable to Jewish Christians. So God waited till the representatives of the Jewish church arrived before He gave His Holy Spirit, to demonstrate that theirs was genuine conversion.

This was a crucial development in the life of the church. There was a need for special authentication by God to disarm the Jewish suspicions. N.B. We never hear again of the Apostles inspecting missionary work, or the Holy Spirit being withheld.

In the case of the Ephesian disciples reported in Acts 19:1-7, who received the Holy Spirit when Paul laid hands on them, they were evidently not Christians at all up to this point. They only knew about John's baptism. They became believers there and then, and were baptised into the name of Jesus and received the Holy Spirit.

These are two exceptional cases. The general rule is that the gift of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a universal blessing received at conversion. The circumstances of Acts

8 & 19 are unusual. It is a fundamental principle of Bible interpretation to begin with general and not special cases.

### Are the gifts still available?

So often when gifts are mentioned, people think of three things – tongues, healing and prophecy. These may be three spectacular gifts, but the gifts of the Spirit are much wider than these. There are five lists in the New Testament – found in 1 Corinthians 12 (2 lists), Romans 12, Ephesians 4 and 1 Peter. Almost 20 distinct gifts are contained in these passages, and there is no reason to suppose this is an exhaustive list. The lists are each a selection from a larger total. Are not the gifts of hymn-writing, Christian poetry, music, different kinds of evangelism present today?

Every Christian has a gift. They need to find out what it is and see that they use it for the upbuilding of the Body of Christ. Many are natural talents, which are taken by the Holy Spirit, heightened and sanctified, and used to God's glorifying ends. Who can doubt that gifts of teaching, counselling, comforting, exhorting, service, generosity, leadership, administration and wisdom are very evident and necessary in the Church today. So the vast majority remain, only some regulatory gifts have ceased. These gifts are given in sovereignty. He apportions as He wills, and there is no occasion for pride among the possessors, or envy among those who lack certain gifts.

Every true New Testament church is a "charismatic church" if the Holy Spirit is active in the life and the worship, and His gifts are being used. Every church is "charismatic" in the Bible sense because it is utterly dependent on the graces of the Holy Spirit. That does not mean it possesses magnetic charm, a dominating personality, tongues speaking, disco-type worship, or spontaneity at the expense of order.

Of all the gifts, teaching is the most essential. Gifts are there to build up the people of God. And the prime way in which they are built up is through the teaching of the truth of God's Word.

The gifts that have ceased are those of Apostleship and prophecy. The Apostles have no successors, for none have seen the risen Christ. And we have the complete revelation of God's truth within the canon of the New Testament, so prophets are no longer needed to be God's mouthpieces. If we still needed prophets, that would be the same as saying Scripture is incomplete.

What of tongues? Some argue that this gift has ceased, and the present experience of tongues is purely of psychological origin. They are not proof of the power of the Holy Spirit because they are also present in the Hindu and Moslem religions, in some sects like the Mormons, and even experienced in some medical conditions. Others accept that tongues are still given as a gift today, but only when someone else is given the gift to interpret what is being said. Certainly some things that are said in tongues are far from the Holy Spirit. It is significant that no great leaders or preachers have ever claimed the gift of tongues, and that they come at the end of Paul's lists, so they were not very significant to him. It is important to see that all is done in due proportion and proper perspective.

The greatest gift and deepest work which God performs is conversion. This is God's first work of grace - new birth, new creation in Christ, raised to new life from spiritual death, from darkness into light, from slavery into sonship, from condemnation into the family of God. Nothing can compare in importance with this first work of grace in the life.

### What should be our relationship now to the Holy Spirit?

The great need of Christians is not to seek new works of grace in their lives – which some have and some have not. We are already blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ; we are already complete in Him. The problem is that we do not realize what we already have. We do not appropriate what is already ours. We do not possess our possessions.

Remember what God has already done in your life. Remember what is already yours. Use it and live by it. **God has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ** (Ephesians 1:3). God cannot add any more to what He has already given you. The important point is that the Holy Spirit who indwells you must also fill you. **Be filled with the Spirit** (Ephesians 5:18). Submit to and be controlled by the Spirit. Baptism is the initial step, fullness is continuous after that. "One baptism, many fillings". Fullness can fluctuate and by our sin it can be lost. When the Spirit is grieved He ceases to fill us. The Holy Spirit must continuously and increasingly fill us up to the measure of our capacity – capacity which will increase. Filled again and again. Each new crisis brings new empowering. As we are increasingly filled we are no longer dominated by self-will, and we allow ourselves to be led by Him.

The chief evidence will be moral and not miraculous, as we are formed into Christ's image. Fullness is not static, but growing, as our capacity grows. Where disbelief and disobedience creep in, fullness is lost and needs to be recovered by repentance and yielding self again to the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes it leads to a new plane and level of Christian living. Fresh filling is available for each new work or responsibility. After a period of disobedience and dryness, a new level of spiritual experience can be felt. But our experience ought not to be the rule for others. New and deeper experiences of God are always possible. The Holy Spirit is mighty, free and sovereign.

"We should expect Him to be active in our lives. God is no lover of staleness and stagnation. His mercies are new every morning. His inward witness that we are God's children is deepened. He produces a tidal wave of love so that we have to ask Him to stay His hand" (D.L.Moody)

When the Holy Spirit is at work in us, there will be a marked advance in our holiness of life. Our hearts will burn within us as we grasp new truth of the Scripture, and see its application in our lives. There will be a quickening of the spiritual pulse, a deepening love for God and man. We will have a pervading sense of peace and well-being. At worship or at the Table, the Lord will show us His glory and therefore we will want to fall down in worship. We have wonderful access of spiritual power for service and an unusual anointing for the work.

In times of spiritual revival, God draws very near. We are aware of an extraordinary visitation by God. A great variety of experiences open to us. But all is incomplete. There is much land still to be possessed. “We rejoice”, but also “we groan” still.

Hence need to be more and more filled with the Spirit. Need to stir up the gift of God in us. Avoid grieving or quenching the Spirit. Worship in the Spirit. Pray in the Spirit. Sing in the Spirit. All service and character has to be charismatic because it is done in the energy of the gifts given by the Holy Spirit. When filled with the Spirit, we will be charismatic figures of unlimited potential. And as we wait on the Lord we renew our strength.

How then do we account for the state of many churches and individuals?

There is so little evidence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the average Christian. It is not because they are not baptised with the Spirit, but because unbelief and disobedience has robbed them of their full inheritance, and they do not remain filled by the Holy Spirit. Need to recover that fullness of the Spirit by confessing our sins. Keep being filled, every day and for every new duty and challenge and crisis. Ask again and again for more filling. **Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you..... If you then, who 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 11:9-13).

This is the reason why some Christians are only shadows of what they should be. **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** (John 7:37,38).