

What A Difference The Holy Spirit Makes!

by Ron R. Ritchie

We have a wonderful God available to us to give us power to live our lives on a moment--by--moment basis. I used to think it was a day--by--day thing. I would pray in the morning, go the whole day on my own strength, and then wonder why I was always in trouble. Now I'm learning to have a moment--by--moment dependence on the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

God the Father has given God the Holy Spirit as a gift to all disciples of God the Son, Jesus, in the "Age of the Spirit" (Pentecost, until his second coming) so that we have the power necessary to cope with all the Spirit requires of us on a day--to--day, moment--by--moment, event--by--event basis in the physical and the spiritual worlds. He gives us patience to deal with leaky waterbeds, love so that we can deal with a trouble" some neighbor, and wisdom and strength to stand against principalities and powers, the dark forces of the air.

God the Holy Spirit is given to all of us in the age of the Spirit to cope with reality. He is given to us so that we can see that all that the circumstances which he brings into our lives are God-directed and God-motivated. Nothing just "hap pens" to the children of God. God is using his Spirit in us to influence his plan of redemption so that people will come to, know him. Next time you get a flat tire you should say' "Lord, whom do you want me to meet? How do you want me to react?" We need to be Spirit--conscious because the spirit is in us, using us to the glory and honor of God. What a difference the Holy Spirit makes in our lives!

What a difference the Holy Spirit made when he came into, the lives of the early disciples! There was a notable difference in them after Pentecost, when the Spirit came upon them. In Luke 24, for example, the post--resurrection passage (the message entitled, "What A Difference A Day Makes") we observed a group of despondent, discouraged disciples. all their hopes and dreams were destroyed, scattered and shattered. They were walking around, rehashing old history about Jesus, the prophet who was.

When Jesus appeared to them the first time, their hearts were again filled with joy and peace, but they had no power to do what God had asked of them. Before the crucifixion, Jesus had said to them, "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and appointed you that you should bear fruit. and that your fruit should remain. I command you that you love one another." The disciples had the joy, the peace and the instructions on what to do, but they had no power because the Spirit of God had not yet come upon them. God had another plan in the "Age of the Spirit. "

Then in John 21 we saw "What A Difference A Humble Spirit Makes." We found that the disciples had moved from Jerusalem to Galilee where they waited obediently for the Lord to appear. When Jesus appeared they had a time of fellowship, a time of love and tenderness at the breakfast which he had prepared for them. Then there was a time of the Lord's testing of Peter to see if he were still qualified to be shepherd of the Lord's sheep. In that passage we discovered that Peter learned humility, but he had no power to be a shepherd because the Spirit had not yet come.

Today we will look at Acts 1. The disciples are back in Jerusalem on this, the fortieth day after the resurrection, waiting for what the Father had promised. The Lord had said, "You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit," so that they could be witnesses for Christ before the whole world, Jews and Gentiles. So here are the eleven apostles together with 109 disciples gathered in Jerusalem, available, but having no power to be witnesses that God had called them to be because the Holy Spirit had not yet been given. Let us see what a difference the Holy Spirit makes in the lives of these struggling Galileans, these fishermen, farmers and carpenters, just regular folks.

1. A Time Of Waiting(Acts1:1-5)

The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. to these He also presented Himself alive, after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. And gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.

Luke, the Greek physician, may have come to know the Lord under Paul's ministry. He wrote to Theophilus, another Greek (his name means "lover of God"), a very accurate account about all that Jesus began to do and teach. (That first account is called the gospel of Luke.) In this, the second account, Luke amplifies the first 11 verses of the last chapter of his gospel and then goes on to write about the ministry of the Spirit.

By the Spirit, the disciples would continue Jesus' work

Luke wants Theophilus to know that the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus were not only to prove to the disciples that he was risen from the dead, but to show them that the Spirit of God would come upon them to continue the ministry of Jesus through them. This would be a ministry of redemption, the calling out of people throughout the whole world, Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles. So Luke is writing to Theophilus a 30-year history of the early church, called the Book of Acts.

We read in verse 4 that Jesus commanded the disciples to wait. I think the hardest thing in the world is to wait on the Lord. I have so many things that could be accomplished if God would only buy my program! Do you realize the pain we could save our children if God would just listen to our prayers for them? "O Lord, please save them and keep them from all harm and danger, now, immediately. May they never have to make a mistake. May they be perfect as soon as they're born, so that my life will not be inconvenienced in any way." Or how about our relationships with our neighbors? "O God, save my neighbor so I don't have to hassle with him. And do it now, please. Don't make it inconvenient for me." We don't want to wait because we don't understand what God is doing. But here the disciples are faced with a time of waiting. God had picked them and he would continue to encourage them and instruct them.

We, in turn, are also encouraged and instructed, because Luke writes and shares with us some of the things that took place then. He tells us that Jesus had given orders by the Holy Spirit to the apostles, whom he had chosen. Here is the key that unlocks the mystery of our Lord's ministry in his humanity, as well as his ministry with us in his post-resurrection, new, eternal body: Jesus still functioned by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Who is the Holy Spirit? Scripture teaches that there is one God, but in the unity of the Godhead there are three eternal and co-equal Persons, the same in essence, but distinct in character. They all function in different ways, so their methods of ministering to God's people are very distinct. In the words of the Nicene Creed (589 AD), "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, and who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified." The Holy Spirit, then, is God in this mystery form called Spirit, not body.

Scripture tells us that the work of the Holy Spirit is the work of God. He enabled Jesus to accomplish the will of the Father on earth. In the Old Testament we find that the Holy Spirit was always in existence with God. He appeared in history when he came upon the prophets, the kings, the judges and the godly men and women of those days. In the New Testament he came upon Simeon the priest, when Christ was born, on John the Baptist and on Christ. With the exception of John the Baptist and Jesus, however, the Spirit came upon certain people to enable them to do certain tasks, then he left them. Their relationship with the Living God was not severed; the task had been accomplished and the Spirit left. But in his life and humanity, Jesus was always controlled by the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit. He became our model for living in the "Age of the Spirit."

In Luke's gospel we discover how involved the Spirit was in Jesus' entire life. The Holy Spirit came upon Mary his mother and she gave birth to Jesus. The Holy Spirit came upon Jesus in the form of a dove at his

baptism so that everyone present would know that the Spirit was involved in Jesus' ministry. The Spirit led Jesus from Jordan up into the wilderness where he was to be confronted by Satan. Following that, the Spirit led him up to Galilee. Luke 4 tells us that the Spirit was the key to Jesus' whole preaching ministry. In the synagogue, Jesus himself quoted Isaiah 61, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me." Now, following his resurrection, Jesus gives instructions to his disciples by the Spirit.

The life which Jesus lived by the Spirit makes clear to us that God the Father wants all of us to live by the power of the Holy Spirit. By our Lord's modeling of the presence and power of the Spirit in his life we know that we are capable to accomplish all that God desires of us in and through our humanity. We have been empowered to cope with reality in the "Age of the Spirit." By ministering and walking in the Spirit, all that we touch has eternal value. No longer do we depend upon fleshly works; now everything we do has eternal results when we are walking by the power and presence of the Spirit to accomplish the will of the Father right here on earth.

What instructions did Jesus give the apostles by the Spirit? In Matthew 28 we read that in one of his post--resurrection appearances, Jesus said, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matt. 28:18-20) The very clear message which he gave to the disciples is that he had risen again from the dead, he would empower them through the Spirit to move out and convert, baptize and teach; and he would never leave them. But they can't do that yet because they have no power. They're available, they've got their orders, but they do not have any power because the Spirit has not yet come.

Second, Luke hints that the disciples had difficulty believing that Jesus really was resurrected. Luke says that over a period of 40 days, Jesus presented "many convincing proofs" to strengthen their faith. Thomas was so skeptical that he said he would not believe in Jesus' resurrection unless he could put his hand in Jesus' side. These convincing proofs Luke speaks of included appeals by Jesus to the minds and the senses of the disciples. He appeared to them over and over again. He spoke to them, he taught them, he commanded them, he encouraged them, he rebuked them, he tested them, he loved them, he forgave them, he ate with them. The disciples became more and more convinced that Jesus their Lord had indeed risen from the dead because of the many convincing proofs he offered them. When people told the disciples that they were hallucinating the disciples could offer as evidence the many times Jesus had appeared to them, his words to them, his eating with them, etc.

Further, Luke says that in his post--resurrection appearances, Jesus spoke of "things concerning the kingdom of God" (verse 3). Through the prophets, the Jews believed that a Messiah would come from the Davidic line, and that he would set up a visible Kingdom on earth. The Messiah would rule over that kingdom and all the nations of earth would come there to be healed and ministered to. The part the Jews like best, however, was that because they were God's chosen people they would rule with him. But Jesus taught them that although that would one day be true, during his days on earth, and in the "Age of the Spirit," the kingdom of God was spiritual.

Speaking of his earthly ministry, Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is among you. It is spiritual, it is designed to conquer the hearts of men and women so that I can rule in them." The apostle Paul says, "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." (Rom. 14:17) Right now the kingdom is spiritual, but one day it will be physical. In the "Age of the Spirit" you and I as his children through the Spirit of God are to conquer the hearts of men and women so that they can live in the kingdom of God. That is our ministry. That invisible kingdom is all around us. It is ruled by the resurrected Lord, and it is powerful to tear down strongholds of evil.

Having provided the disciples with these "convincing proofs," by his appearances, his speaking with them and eating with them, and now by his teaching, Jesus commands them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for what the Father had promised. Yes, waiting is such a difficult thing, but to minister without the Spirit is a waste of time, energy and money. In our day we are faced with so many fleshly religious projects, programs and activities. But there is a right and a wrong way to minister, and in the disciples' case the right way is to wait.

One of the joys of being a pastor at PBC is to watch our Elders wait on the Lord. They just don't panic, they don't say, "We've got to do such--and--such a thing right away." They take everything before the Lord and, as men of God who are responsible for the people in this congregation, they wait on him. Some are a little anxious about their decisions, however. I have sometimes thought, "Well, I asked for a decision on Wednesday night, the meeting was Thursday, so what do you mean there's no answer on Friday morning? They decided to wait? But you don't understand. I've got people to see, places to go, things to do, and I want their permission. If they won't give it then I'll have to take matter, into my own hands." Later, of course, the Elders have to come to pick up the pieces, to heal the broken hearts of all those I've run over and insulted. It takes months to clean up the mess because I wasn't willing to wait. But Elders are willing to wait on the Spirit.

What were the disciples to wait for? Well, for the promise of God the Father, who had said he would send the Holy Spirit to them. (John 14:6, 26; 15:26; 16:7-11) God the Holy Spirit would come upon all the disciples, all at once, to continue through them God's ministry on earth during the "Age of the Spirit."

What are the characteristics of the Holy Spirit? In summary, according to these passages, the Lord promised that he would go away but he would send another Helper, one just like him, only he would be Spirit, not body, and he would be with all of the disciples at the same time, with the same intimacy that they had experienced with Jesus. The Spirit of Truth would be with them always. The world would not be able to receive him, yet the disciples would know him; he would abide with them and in them. This Spirit would teach them all things, and bring to mind all that Jesus said to them. He would proceed from the Father, he would bear witness of Jesus, and he would convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment through the disciples and us.

The Holy Spirit is God in us, all of us, at the same time. Each one of us who has accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior is indwelt by the Spirit of God. But the disciples had to wait for this. Jesus had told them, "John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. You will all be identified with, placed into the Body of Christ, spiritually, by the Holy Spirit." The disciples, of course, were believers before the age of the Spirit began. The issue was not their relationship with God, rather it was that God was designing a whole new thing called the Body of Christ into which they would all be placed so that they could all function together by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, therefore, is the gift of the Father to all believers, Jew and Gentile. As 1 Cor. 12:13 says: "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jew or Gentile, whether slave or free, and were all made to drink of one Spirit. "

So, for the disciples, this was to be a time of waiting. Have you ever noticed that Jesus was never in a hurry? He never seemed to panic. We need to learn from him this lesson. In his humanity, even in his post-resurrection body, Jesus depended on the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish the Father's will on earth.

We have seen that the Father has given us the gift of the Holy Spirit to cope with all that reality hands us. He empowers us in our ministries; he sustains us in facing spiritual warfare; he gives us wisdom, courage and patience, whatever we need. The Spirit is available to present that in our bodies, to his honor and glory.

In my own life I've been seeking to depend more and more on a moment-by-moment basis to really understand who I am and who I should be in the sight of God. Just before I meet people I find myself asking God to give me the discernment, the wisdom and love necessary to function. I find that I wait and pray before I make certain phone calls. When I'm talking to someone I ask the Spirit to use me so that the very life of Christ may be seen in me, that I might be attractive to that person so that he might come to know Jesus as Lord and Savior. I want to have the same Spirit-consciousness that Jesus had. I hope you too want that.

2. A Time Of Witnessing(Acts 1:6-8)

Here we go with the Kingdom again! The disciples still don't get it; they still want that kingdom: "But Lord, you've been resurrected from the dead! You've been with us 40 days! Now's the time to go back and make the rulers of the nation eat crow. And we'll serve with you." Jesus says, "Let me go over it one more time, because I'm leaving. Don't worry about the kingdom, the physical, national, visible kingdom. For three years

I've prepared you to be witnesses. My kingdom is spiritual. You want all the honor and the glory now, you want the world to see you as kings, but I want you to accomplish the King's business by the power of the Holy Spirit. "

This is not electric power by which you zap people by your witness. No, this power is supplied by the quiet, wonderful personality of the Holy Spirit. We're talking about power of the Person of God, the power of the resurrected Lord, the power that overcomes death. This power defeats Satan and his demons; it changes hearts from within, it heals, it unites and harmonizes, it teaches, it produces boldness, it brings life out of death. This is the power that will enable these uneducated Galileans to witness to the world about the resurrected Jesus Christ and how he can change them to become the children of God, with new hearts and new minds.

We witness by the power of the Indwelling Holy Spirit

The root word for witness is martyr. They were to witness to the point of death. All of the disciples, except John, died a martyr's death while witnessing. If you don't like the possibility of dying for Jesus, then, for heaven's sake, don't witness. And we are to be witnesses, not to do witnessing. I flunked Evangelism 101 in the Bible school I attended because I didn't do witnessing. Each week they told us to go out and witness, but I didn't feel like doing witnessing. I thought I was a witness because the Spirit of God was within me. Finally, just to get them off my back, to do my witnessing I met a bum in Central Park in Philadelphia every Wednesday and I paid him a dollar to listen to me.

We are to be witnesses by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. These disciples were witnessing about who Jesus Christ was, and the good news that others too could experience life as it was intended to be lived. They were to be men and women, as Michael Green says, who were to gossip about Jesus. If we could just turn all our gossiping into godly conversation, if we were accused of being men and women who gossiped about Jesus what a marvelous witness it would be! To witness for the Lord by the power of the Holy Spirit is to be so God-conscious that the next word that comes out of your mouth is saying something about what the Lord has done for you, in you, through you.

What a difference the Holy Spirit makes! These disciples were told to be witnesses throughout the whole world. They were to go into the most difficult situations, to Jerusalem, where the rulers were seeking to kill them, to Samaria, where the "half--breed" lived, the Jew/Gentiles who were to be avoided at all costs, and to the Gentile "dogs" and tell them about Jesus. They were to do this in the power of the Holy Spirit when they were baptized by the Spirit of God. Yes, when we walk in the Spirit (because we now live in the Age of the Spirit), life becomes a whole new adventure.

Our heavenly Father, please teach us how to understand and appropriate God the Holy Spirit in our lives as you modeled him in the life of Jesus Christ. May we depend on him, may we appropriate him today, may we choose to walk in the Spirit and to have his power, his wisdom, his love expressed through us. We ask this in your Son's name, Amen.

Acts 1:1 -5
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