

'IN CHRIST WE HAVE OUR REDEMPTION'

SERIES: PAUL, AN INSTRUMENT OF THE RISEN CHRIST

by Ron Ritchie

In spite of the negative coverage given the television evangelists in the media these past few months, a glance at the popular newspapers and magazines demonstrates that religion is once again a popular subject.

The widespread interest in the recent so-called "Harmonic Convergence" gave evidence that there is a spiritual hunger among people today. Also, I have read that the Esalen seminars in the Big Sur area of California are popular once again. The leader of that group has been quoted as saying, "we come not to rework our practical life but to discover an inner life, to respond to a vocation, to find a calling." Another recent phenomenon, especially here in California, is that of "channeling." Mediums allow themselves to be controlled by spirits who then lecture, counsel, teach or otherwise advise others. This seems to be a form of voluntary possession in which the various spirits repeat the three-fold primal lie: there is no death; man is God; and, knowledge of self is salvation and power. Shirley Maclaine, the movie actress, whom many consider one of the leaders of this movement, recently starred in a movie about her own life and her discoveries in the spiritual realm. Her philosophy was probably most clearly revealed in the scene where she shouted, "I am God!" A channel on the Merv Griffin television talk show was asked what was the most important message for mankind. Here was the reply: "What is termed God is within your being, and that which is called Christ is within your being...and when you know you are God, you will find joy." Another indication that there is a spiritual hunger abroad was obvious in last week's visit to this country by the Pope. Tens of thousands of people came out to see him, hoping to receive a blessing from him.

Have you asked yourself why are people so spiritually hungry? It is because men and women were created in the image of God and as such they have a spiritual nature. Because of our rebelliousness, however, we have disobeyed God and we are forever seeking to develop our spiritual life to the exclusion of God. But we remain unsatisfied, for we need to be redeemed from our bondage to sin and rebellion. And redemption is to be found only in Jesus Christ. As Scripture says, "for there is no other name given among men whereby we must be saved." "In Him we have redemption," says the apostle Paul in Ephesians.

Redemption is the subject of our message this morning as we look at another chapter in the life of the apostle Paul. We have been studying the apostle's second missionary journey, and have already looked at his ministry in the city of Corinth. He has now concluded his work there and feels moved of the Spirit to return to Jerusalem. Accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila, he sets sail first for Ephesus, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Although he is well received in that city, he is determined to return to Jerusalem and Antioch. In departing Ephesus says to the believers there, "I will return to you again if God wills." Leaving Priscilla and Aquila in the city, he sets sail for Cesarea on the western coast of Israel, and then travels on to Antioch. After spending time there, he then travels on for the third time through the Galatian region and Phrygia, "strengthening all the disciples" (Acts 18:23).

In Ephesus, Aquila and Priscilla heard Apollos, an Alexandrian Jew, who was "speaking out boldly in the synagogue." According to Acts 18:24, this man was "mighty in the Scriptures." He was "speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John." Priscilla and Aquila took him aside and instructed him about the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus, the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, and other details of the gospel. Having been instructed in the whole counsel of God, Apollos then traveled on to Southern Greece, "...and when he arrived, he helped greatly those who had believed through grace, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ" (Acts 18:27b,28). Apollos finally ended up in Corinth, teaching and preaching in the church which Paul had founded there on the final leg of his second missionary journey. Writing about this church later, Paul would say of Apollos, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth" (1 Cor.3:6).

We pick up the apostle's story today with Paul's arrival in Ephesus. There he meets a group of disciples whose hearts were already being prepared by the Holy Spirit to receive the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I. Hearts Prepared for a Redeemer, Acts 19:1-4

And it came about that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper country came to Ephesus, and found some disciples, and he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said to him, "No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." And he said, "Into what were you baptized?" And they said, "Into John's baptism." And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus.

The city of Ephesus was a strategic center of trade for the Roman Empire. Paul found that the inhabitants of the city were keenly interested in magic and the occult. In 500 B.C., the people of the city had erected a temple to the nature goddess Diana. A unique feature of the cult that was built around this goddess was that it was associated with a meteoric stone, the "image which fell down from Jupiter," according to Acts 19:35. The original temple burned down in 356 B.C., but in 334 B.C., Alexander the Great contributed largely to a new temple of unrivalled splendor which was ranked among the seven wonders of the ancient world.

It was in this cosmopolitan center of Ephesus therefore that Paul discovered twelve followers of the teaching of John the Baptist. They had not heard of Jesus' death and resurrection, nor had they heard about the giving of the Holy Spirit to believers. The message of John and, of course, of Apollos also, was, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand...I baptize you in water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not even fit to remove His sandals; for He himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." According to this message, men and women could repent of their sins and receive forgiveness from God without going to the temple and offering sacrifice. Included in this message also was a word of hope that when he came, the Messiah would baptize them with the Holy Spirit.

But these disciples of John had no knowledge that the Messiah had already come, that he had been crucified and resurrected from the dead, and that the Holy Spirit had come on the day of Pentecost. That is why Paul asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed." "No," was their reply, "we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." Some Christians read Paul's question and insert the word "since" for "when," thus rendering it, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit since you believed?" They hold that Christians do not receive the Holy Spirit until they demonstrate a lifestyle of obedience; then they can pray for the "second blessing--the coming of the Holy Spirit into their lives. But "when," not "since," is the word used by Paul. The context will demonstrate that when people come to Christ, they immediately receive the Holy Spirit.

These disciples of John, of course, had heard of the Holy Spirit through their leader's teaching as well as the Old Testament writings. But they had not heard of Jesus' word,

"If any one thirst, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.' Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who had believed in Him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given because Jesus was not yet glorified." (John 7:37-39)

Paul noticed that something was missing--which was the power and the fruit of the Holy Spirit--in the spiritual lives of these men in Ephesus. Their hearts had been prepared to receive Christ--they were in the process of being saved--but they had not yet been born again. They were like the fetus in the womb: possessing life, but not yet having been born.

Before the Lord Jesus went to the cross he gathered his disciples in the Upper Room and said to them these words concerning the Holy Spirit, "My Father will give you another Helper who will be with you forever...He is the Spirit of truth who will abide in you...He will teach you all things...He will convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment through you...He will guide you into all truth...He will bear witness of Me...He

shall glorify Me...He shall take of Mine and disclose it to you." This was the Spirit to whom Paul was referring when he asked the disciples of John the question, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" When they placed their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, they immediately received the gift of the Holy Spirit without asking, begging, praying, obeying, emptying or yielding themselves.

And the same goes for all believers in all generations. The Holy Spirit is given as the gift of God for all who place their faith in Jesus Christ. The missing link for these disciples was not teaching on how to be baptized in the Holy Spirit, but how to place their faith in Jesus Christ who would then give them the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In the Age of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit has five activities in the life of the passive believer, and the passive believer in turn has one active responsibility. 1) The Holy Spirit, as a member of the Godhead, convicts the world of sin, righteousness and judgment in and through believers. 2) The Holy Spirit regenerates the new believer, who then receives eternal life, a new nature, and becomes a new creature in Christ. 3) The Holy Spirit places (baptizes) the new believer into the Body of Christ, a once for all experience, and makes all believers one in Christ. 4) The Holy Spirit indwells the new believer, taking up permanent residence in his heart. 5) The Holy Spirit seals the believer's new security. This seal is the certainty of being possessed by God and preserved until the day of redemption. The Spirit is therefore, in a sense, Christ's engagement ring to his bride the Church.

Having received the Holy Spirit, the believer's responsibility then is to be filled with the Spirit, i.e. to obey the commands and promptings of the Spirit from within to live according to the believer's new nature; to allow the Spirit to so work in him or her that others may see Christ in them. This is a conscious choice for the Christian that he will, moment by moment, day by day, have to make. I am always surprised at how many Christians are unaware of the activity of the Holy Spirit in their lives. For instance, after I had spoken of these things at a recent conference, the wife of a church deacon said to me, "I never knew that Christ was to live inside me and that I was to trust the Holy Spirit to empower me to minister."

Paul's second question to the disciples of John was, "Into what then were you baptized?" They replied, "John's baptism." Paul was asking, in effect, what message they had been identified with. When you were baptized, what did that mean to you? was his question. They replied that John's message was that men should repent of their sins and thus prepare their hearts for the coming Messiah. Thus, they had experienced a baptism of expectation, not fulfillment. These men were still awaiting the coming of the Messiah and were unaware that he had already come twenty years earlier. The apostle thus became God's instrument to relate to these disciples the full story of the salvation process. As Paul would write later in Romans,

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call upon Him: for "whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved." How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? So faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of Christ.

The apostle had the joy of sharing with these men the full story of redemption, for only in Christ can man be redeemed. Christ became a curse for us, thus setting us free from the curse of the law and from the slave-market of sin and death. His death on the cross therefore was the price of our redemption. As Paul wrote later to the Ephesians, "In Him we have redemption, through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us."

Whenever I read these verses my thoughts go back to the day in Columbia when I was part of a group ministering in a jungle prison. One afternoon a prisoner approached me and said, "Will you redeem me?" A guard explained that the man was asking me to pay one thousand pesos so that he could be released from prison, he having already served time for his crime. I was dumbfounded. For such a small amount of money--about eight dollars--I could "redeem" this man. I wanted to redeem every man in the prison! I will never forget the look of joy on his face when I paid the price for his redemption from that hell-hole in the jungle. But what a price Jesus Christ had to pay for our redemption! He had to pay with his life so that we might be freed from our bondage to sin and death.

Having heard the complete gospel from Paul, these disciples in Ephesus were now ready to have their hearts

cleansed by their Redeemer.

II. Hearts Cleansed By Their Redeemer, Acts 19:5-7

And when they had heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying. And there were about in all twelve men.

Having heard the apostle identify Jesus as the One whom John the Baptist declared to be the Messiah, each of the twelve men placed his faith in Jesus as his Lord, and each was baptized in Jesus' name. Paul then "laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying."

Writing in his book *Growth of the Body*, Ray Stedman says this about Paul's act of laying his hands on these men,

Please understand that he did not impart anything to them; that is never what the laying on of hands does. Rather, it signifies identification. Paul is identifying these twelve people with the body of Christ, that new body formed by the Holy Spirit when he came on the day of Pentecost. By laying his hands on them he is signifying their union with the family of the Lord Jesus. The moment Paul performed this act of identification the Spirit came upon them, actually joining them to the body of Christ. They believed on Jesus and the unifying Spirit came immediately.

Spiritual gifts are given to all members of the body of Christ to be used among the body and also to be used to minister toward lost humanity. As a physical body has many physical members, each different but contributing to the whole body so that it functions in harmony with the rest of the body, so the Holy Spirit places each new believer into a certain position within the body of Christ and then gifts him or her with spiritual endowments to minister spiritually within and without the body.

Here is what the apostle Peter says about this subject of spiritual gifts,

As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, let him speak as it were the utterance of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and the dominion forever and ever. (1 Pet.4:10-11)

In this situation in Ephesus, the Holy Spirit chose to impart the gifts of tongues and prophesying, fulfilling the prophecies of Isaiah 28 and Joel 2 respectively, to these twelve men.

As this gift of tongues is the subject of much debate in our day, I would like to make the following points about the spiritual gift as it is found in the Scriptures. 1) The gift was given by the Holy Spirit for the common good of the whole body. It was not given to be used in private. 2) The gift of tongues is a language used somewhere in the world, spoken by a believer without his ever having learned that language. 3) Tongues are given to be used to praise the mighty acts of God. 4) When spoken in a church service, tongues are to be interpreted for those present by another believer who has the gift of interpretation. 5) Tongues are to be a witness to unbelieving Jews.

In this case in Ephesus, these men, who were Jews living in a Jewish community, would be used by the Holy Spirit to witness that God was at work among them, in fulfillment of Isaiah 28,

"By men of strange tongues and by the lips of strangers I will speak to this people, and even

so they will not listen to me," says the Lord.

Thus, when Jews heard men and women speaking praises to God in foreign tongues, they would recognize that the time had come when God had turned from Israel to offer salvation to the Gentile world.

As we hear so much about the gift of tongues in the church today, I would ask you to measure the experiences you hear about by the yardstick of the biblical gift of tongues. If you do, you will see a wide gap between them. The spiritual gift of tongues was and is a "sign" gift, given by the Holy Spirit to minister to unbelievers.

Then the second gift given these men, the spiritual gift of prophecy, is the God-given ability to teach the Scriptures in truth and power. This gift enables people to understand the word and apply to their lives the truths they are taught. First Corinthians 14 says this of the gift of prophecy: "But one who prophecies speaks to men for edification [building up] and exhortation [comfort] and consolation [identification]" These things bring conviction, with the result that men worship God and declare that God is certainly amongst them.

The twelve men who had come to faith in Ephesus then were given the two gifts of tongues and prophesying so that they would witness to their new faith in Jesus Christ to the Jewish community in Ephesus. The gift of tongues would harden the hearts of the Jews who were in the process of perishing; and the gift of prophecy would enlighten those Jews who were in the process of being saved.

It is the Holy Spirit who bestows spiritual gifts; the Lord who gives the ministries; and God the Father who produces the effects. At a singles' conference in Mt. Hermon a number of years ago, I heard Phil Hook point out that Christians should discover the gift which the Holy Spirit has given them. "Unwrap that gift," he counseled, "and then wrap your life around it." How the Christian world today needs to hear that message!

In summary, I want to remind you again that we are privileged to live in the Age of the Spirit, a time when God is "calling out a people for His name's sake" from among all the nations of earth. People everywhere need to be redeemed from bondage to sin for, as Scripture says, "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." And furthermore, Scripture clearly declares that the only One who is capable of redeeming mankind from its enslavement to sin and death is Jesus Christ. He died on the cross in our place so as to redeem us from the curse of the law and from the slave market of sin. If we will place our faith in him as our Lord and Savior, we will discover that "in Him we have redemption, through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which he lavished upon us." As a result of our redemption we are given the gift of the Holy Spirit, who then endows us with spiritual gifts which we use to glorify God both within and without his church.

Christianity, you see, is not a religion but a relationship with the risen Lord Jesus. In him we have righteousness, peace and joy as we live day by day in the power of the Holy Spirit. In this new relationship we will have excitement, adventure and hope, as we serve our God in his plan of redemption for mankind. How is all of this possible? It is because "in Christ we have our redemption, through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace."

To those of you who have not yet been redeemed I say, confess Jesus now as Lord. There is salvation in no one else, not in the Harmonic Convergence, not in Esalen, not in the spirits who are being called up in channeling, not in seeking a blessing from a pope.

And to those of you who have made Jesus your Lord and Savior I say, Have you opened your gift which was given to you at your new birth by the Holy Spirit? You won't have to buy batteries to make this gift work. The Holy Spirit himself will empower you to use it. Or, if you have already found your gift, are you wrapping your life around it? These are the questions we should be asking ourselves as we come to the end of this series.

Acts 19:1-7
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