

## Living By The Spirit

Thursday Morning Group; term 3, 2019; Grant Thorpe; 28 August

# The Gift of the Spirit

## Acts 2

Our humanity is in deep need of God's inbreathing. As it was at creation (Gen. 1:2; cf. John 20:22), so will it always be.

- ▣ We incline, profoundly, to self-trust, and to enjoyment of seen and felt benefits. Rather, our humanity is made for what may appear at first to be intangible things—for love, for God, for purity, for purpose.
- ▣ Israel is an example of being launched by God's Spirit into a life of faith (Isa. 63:11, 14; also Num. 11:17:14:14, ~~25, 29~~; Neh. 9:20; Hag. 2:5), only to then grieve him (Isa. 63:10) and reject his gracious wooing through the prophets (Neh. 9:30; Zech. 7:12) and prefer the things produced by a world without God.
- ▣ Israel's situation is exacerbated as God's judgements come upon them.
- ▣ It is into this setting that Isaiah prays, 'Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down' (Isa. 64:1).
- ▣ This, then, is what God will do. Despite Israel's preference for the world of things seen, and a life with themselves at the centre, God will renew his people inwardly by the coming of his Spirit (Ezek. 36:27; Gal. 3:14)—coming in an entirely new way.
- ▣ Isaiah's prayer is answered when Jesus is baptized and the Holy Spirit falls, first, on God's Messiah (Mark 1:10).
- ▣ The first commandment is that we love God with all our heart, mind and strength (Mark 12:28-30). This will never happen apart from the renewing of the Holy Spirit.
- ▣ The days in which we live are not defined by the world's insistence that everything be explained and produced by natural phenomena. These are the days of the opened heavens—the days of God's Spirit.

The ministry of Jesus will be carried forward by the Spirit.

- ▣ John the Baptist announces that Jesus, the Christ, will baptize with the Spirit—a work greater by far than anything John could do (Matt. 3:11). Only through Jesus could this renewing Spirit come upon us.
- ▣ Jesus himself works and prays by the power of the Spirit (Mark 12:28; Luke 10:21), including his work on the cross (Heb. 9:14).
- ▣ Jesus longs for the coming 'fire' that will cleanse and renew and empower God's people (Luke 12:49).
- ▣ Jesus makes much of his going so the Spirit may come (John 14:26; 15:26).
- ▣ He dies, and rises again, and teaches his disciple about the kingdom, giving them commands by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:2-3). The disciples are about to see God's reign established wholly by God—by his Spirit.
- ▣ Jesus commands the apostles to 'wait' until they are visited with power from above (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4). Nothing can happen without the Spirit's presence.

God's immediate presence—the Spirit—equips the apostles to announce God's reign or kingdom.

- ❑ The Spirit comes as God promised (Acts 2:16-21)—as a gift (Acts 8:19-20; 10:45; 11:16-17)—to sinners.
- ❑ The evidence is clear that what is happening cannot be naturally explained (Acts 2:15). The apostles have been freed from all fear and egotism to announce the ‘wonderful works of God’ (Acts 2:11).
- ❑ The apostles need the Spirit’s revelations of Christ—an inward power, and his administration—an outward power, to speak the word as it should be spoken (Eph. 1:19-20). The human spirit cannot achieve the poise, create the situations or produce the effects of God’s reign unless he himself is present.

The Spirit exposes us for what we are.

- ❑ Jesus had said the Spirit would come and convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgement (John 16:7-11). Now he does just that (Acts 2:36-37).
- ❑ Only the Spirit can cut through the world’s deceptions, inward blindness and human hubris to make it clear that Jesus is Lord and that to reject him is to fight God. And only he can persuade this now anxious sinner that God is gracious!

The Spirit creates new life—life to God, love poured into our hearts.

- ❑ The Holy Spirit is God’s gift to those who turn from self-trust to rely on Jesus Christ as Saviour. Forgiveness is conveyed by God’s own Presence (Acts 2:38).
- ❑ The first sign of new life is repentance—a whole-scale turning from self-justification to place oneself wholly under the judgement and word of God (Acts 2:37; also Tit. 3:3-7).
- ❑ The second sign of new life is wholehearted receiving of and gratefulness for the work of Christ—expressed in baptism (Acts 2:41). Fear of civic retribution is as nothing to those who love Christ.
- ❑ The third sign of new life (here) is the creation of a community of God’s people (Acts 2:42-47). Selfishness, egotism, envy and greed are destroyed and we can be as we were created to be—a family.
- ❑ The glory that left Israel’s temple when they rejected God (Ezek. 10) now returns in power on the newly created people-temple (Eph. 2:18-22; also 2 Cor. 3:7-11.)

This is the day of the Spirit.

- ❑ We are not called on to pray for the Spirit’s coming. To do this is to steer around the fact that this outpouring is what happens because Jesus prays—not us. The coming of the Spirit is witness to Christ’s lordship over sin, death and the world, a lordship to which we must submit—and so, receive the Spirit.
- ❑ Well may we pray for days of refreshing (Acts 3:19—note, this is through forgiveness), or for enlightenment (Eph. 1:17-18; 3:16), or for boldness to proclaim the word as first happened at Pentecost (Eph. 6:19).
- ❑ The promise is to all whom the Lord calls (Acts 2:38-39), and so every believer receives all that is received on this first day.
- ❑ The church springs up in the midst of God deniers who make the position of those with no visible means of support seem foolish and feel vulnerable. The answer is not to meet opposition with earthly weapons but to operate by the Spirit (Zech. 4:6).
- ❑ The Spirit continues to direct and empower the whole story of Acts. He is referred to over 50 times and particularly at key moments of the narrative.

- ▣ Christian life is not difficult; it is impossible. But this is to make clear that only God can produce a Christian! We cannot produce the church by processes. It needs the convicting, baptising, leading, enlightening and filling of the Holy Spirit.
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