

The Coming of the Holy Spirit

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Introduction

- We have been busy with a series on the person and work of the Holy Spirit.
- We have looked at His work in the Old Testament and in the life of Christ.
- Today, we move into the third leg of the series, where we will be considering the Spirit in Acts.
- In particular, we will be considering the coming of the Holy Spirit as it is described in [Acts 1](#) and 2.
- Instead of doing a verse-by-verse exposition, or framing the message around 3 or 4 points, I would like for us to touch upon specific sections in the first two chapters. I will make some observations as we go.
- Let us begin in [Acts 1:4-8](#)

Acts 1:4-8 NKJV

⁴ And being assembled together with *them*, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which,” *He said*, “you have heard from Me; ⁵ for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” ⁶ Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷ And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. ⁸ But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

- There are two things I would like to highlight from this passage.
- Firstly, notice that Jesus refers to the coming of the Holy Spirit as the *Promise of the Father*.
 - Remember that last week, we spoke about the Filioque controversy — the question of whether the Spirit proceeded from (or sent from) the Father, or the Son, or both. This was a controversy that resulted in the Great Schism between the Eastern and Western churches.
 - As I had mentioned, this controversy was unfortunate, because the bible clearly shows that all the members of the trinity are involved.
 - In [John 14:16](#), Jesus says that He will pray to the Father, and the Father will provide another Helper.
 - In [John 14:26](#), Jesus says the Father will send the Helper in Jesus name.
 - In [John 15:26](#), Jesus says that He will send the Helper from the Father.
 - In [John 16:7](#), Jesus says that when He departs, He will send the Helper.
 - We concluded that the coming of the Spirit was therefore a trinitarian act.
 - Inasmuch as the Father and the Son share the responsibility of *sending*, we must remember that it is the Spirit Who *goes*.
 - And so, as I was saying last week, and as Jesus has repeatedly affirmed, this coming of the Spirit
 - Was not plan B.
 - Was not a makeshift solution to accommodate us now that Jesus is ascended.
 - Was not an interim arrangement to tide us over until the end of the age.

- His coming was the plan from eternity past, and as Peter reminds those who would witness the Spirit's coming in [Acts 2](#), this is what Joel had said would happen.
- No longer was the Spirit going to only come upon select servants — the prophets, priests and kings of the Old Testament — but He would be poured out on all flesh. Sons and daughters would prophesy, young men would see visions, old men would see dreams.
- And as we see later in [Acts 1:15](#), the number of people who would receive this baptism was 120, including the disciples, Mary the mother of Jesus, His brothers, and the extended group of disciples.
- This was no exclusive group. The baptism was for man, woman and child and was the very fulfilment of the promise of the Father and the prayer of Moses.

Numbers 11:29 NKJV

²⁹ Then Moses said to him, “Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all the LORD’s people were prophets *and* that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!”

- The second thing I would like to bring to your attention is the fact that in [Acts 1](#), Jesus refers to what the disciples were about to experience as a *baptism* in the Holy Spirit.
- Now, before we speak about that, let's turn our attention to [Acts 2:1-4](#), and as we read, take note of what the phenomenon is referred to here.

Acts 2:1-4 NKJV

¹ When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. ² And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ Then

there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

- So, in [Acts 1](#), Jesus says they will be *baptised* with the Holy Spirit, while in [Acts 2](#), Luke says they were *filled* with the Holy Spirit.
- Now there exists within the church today a debate over the difference between baptism and infilling.
- To a large extent, the debate has been motivated by the rise of the Pentecostal movement.
 - Throughout Christian history, until the turn of the 20th century, the predominant view among mainstream Christians was that Spirit baptism occurs at conversion. This, it is argued, is what Paul says in [1 Corinthians 12:13](#):

1 Corinthians 12:13 NKJV

¹³ For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.

- For centuries, the understanding of the Christian church was that the reception of the Spirit is the privilege of every person who comes to faith in the the Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, the bible teaches that we cannot come to Him and cannot even profess His name apart from the Spirit and so to argue that someone can come to faith or live the Christian life apart from the work of the Spirit is nonsensical.
- Classic Pentecostals, however, argued that we need to try and emulate what happened at Pentecost in the life of every believer. Every believer must be baptised in the Holy Spirit. Spirit baptism, they argued, is a secondary experience that happens subsequent to conversion. Further,

Classic Pentecostalism argued that speaking in tongues was the evidence of this baptism.

- Unfortunately, by requiring tongues as a benchmark, this theology created something of a two-tiered Christianity — the spiritually elite vs the rest.
- This prompted modern scholars to respond.
 - Some of a more conservative persuasion responded with an outright rejection.
 - They did so in several ways, but there were two main arguments.
 - First, they argued that Pentecost was a once-off event, a theophany much like what we saw in the Old Testament, with a mighty rushing wind and tongues of fire as visible manifestations of the Spirit of God. The purpose of this event was the empowerment of those early believers for ministry, although they argue that by the time the bible had been written, or by the end of the 1st century, they no longer needed these empowerments, and so these things ceased.
 - Second, they argued that the tongues we read of here in [Acts 2](#) were an actual language and that this is inconsistent with the sort of tongues we hear spoken today. On this basis, they argue that the tongues that are spoken today are a learned form of gibberish and not an actual gift of the Spirit.
 - I believe that this is an unfortunate overreaction by the conservatives to an unfortunate overemphasis by the Pentecostals.
 - Let's consider these arguments each in turn:
 - Firstly, these conservatives did not take into consideration the overall trajectory of the work of the Spirit across the entirety of the biblical canon: from Moses, through the Old Testament prophets,

priests, kings and judges, through Joel, through the teaching of Jesus (especially in His farewell discourse), through the promise of the Father in early Acts, through the balance of Acts itself, through the writings of the NT authors to the early church, and through church history.

- Friends, God did not plan for the coming and empowerment of the Holy Spirit from eternity past only to give the fullness of His Spirit for 100 years!
- Secondly, these conservatives did not take into consideration that the bible actually teaches that there are different kinds of tongues that serve different purposes and that those purposes have not changed:
 - Xenolalia — the speaking of an actual but unknown language, which is what is happening in [Acts 2.1](#) have heard testimonies of missionaries who have found themselves in contexts where they could not understand the language, were prompted to speak, and were understood by the indigenous people. There is still a need for such a gifting today!
 - Glossolalia — the speaking of something that is not an actual language. This is what Paul is referring to in [1 Corinthians 14](#), where he says that he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no-one understands him — he speaks *mysteries in the spirit*. This type of tongue can be directed to God in private prayer, for the purpose of self-edification, or it can be uttered in a public setting. However, since no human understands it, should it be uttered in a public setting, it requires an interpretation. Significantly, Paul adds tongues to the list of spiritual gifts in [1 Corinthians 12](#), which are examples of manifestations of the Spirit for the common good of the church.

As far as I am concerned, there has never been a moment in history where the church has not been in dire need of the edification that only the Spirit of God can bring.

- So, to argue that this was a once-off event, that the tongues we hear spoken today are inconsistent with what happened at Pentecost, and that we should therefore dismiss these things robs the church of a blessing that God had intended from eternity past!
- Thankfully, others have responded with a much more balanced view:
 - Spirit baptism occurs once, at conversion, for every believer, incorporating the believer into the body of Christ ([1 Corinthians 12:13](#), [Romans 8:9](#)). If you believe in Jesus and have accepted Him as your Lord and saviour, you can rest assured that you have been baptised in the Holy Spirit.
 - There are multiple, subsequent in-fillings of the Holy Spirit, which empower the believer for service.
 - While tongues is *an evidence* of the work of the Spirit, they are not a *necessary evidence* of the work of the Spirit.
- This interpretation, I believe, takes the entirety of what the bible teaches into account. It is less restrictive, opening up the conversation and acknowledging the trajectory of the work of the Spirit across the Testaments.
- It acknowledges further that the Spirit does what He wants when He wants, and that our appropriate posture is not to bicker about baptisms and in-fillings and whether they are relevant today, but to follow the example of the 120 and to come together in one place, in one accord, and to wait expectantly for the Spirit to do what He wants.

- Jesus said they would be *baptised*, Luke said they were *filled*.
- The two are not mutually exclusive.
- They are two dimensions of the very same working of almighty God.
- It seems to me that it does us little good trying to describe these infinite things with our finite minds.
- It is better to just let the Spirit do what He wants, even as we position ourselves to be used by Him.
- This brings me to the next thing I would like for us to consider, which are the implications of this phenomenon.

Acts 2:5–8 NKJV

⁵ And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. ⁶ And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. ⁷ Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, “Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? ⁸ And how *is it that* we hear, each in our own language in which we were born?

Acts 2:9–12 NKJV

⁹ Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.” ¹² So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “Whatever could this mean?”

- One of the byproducts of a theology of tongues as a necessary evidence of the baptism of a privileged, elite few is that it created the perception that tongues are received and retained primarily for personal edification.
- As we have seen, tongues can be for personal edification, but that is not the whole story. What we see in [Acts 2](#) is that tongues can serve a broader purpose.
- If you remember last week, we noted that in His farewell discourse, Jesus made it clear that when the Spirit comes, He would convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. In the context of the farewell discourse, the world were the unbelieving Jews. Jesus was arguing that while the Spirit would come as a Helper, for the benefit of the believer, He would also convict the world through the disciples, showing them that
 - Their judgment regarding Jesus was wrong.
 - Their understanding of righteousness was wrong.
 - Their understanding of sin was wrong.
- Now, take a look at [Acts 2:5](#) again. Notice who the multitude was who heard the sound, came together, and heard the disciples speaking in different languages.
- They were Jews! Devout men, from every nation under heaven. They were representatives of the world!
- Friends, what we are seeing here is what Jesus said would happen.
- If this isn't an affirmation of the work of the Holy Spirit, nothing is.
- We get all tied up in knots about what tongues are, who qualifies for them, and whether they are relevant for today.

- But the Spirit is more concerned that the world hears the gospel concerning Jesus Christ. He will take a human mouthpiece and use it to utter whatever He chooses — a known language, an unknown language — provided that utterance proclaims the truth of the gospel and allows for the hearer to hear that
 - Righteousness is not just about being a good person and causing no harm to others.
 - Sin is more than just a bump in the road that can be fixed with self-reflection.
 - Jesus Christ is the answer to sin.
- If we get caught up in the controversy, we have missed the point.
- Heaven forbid that we would be a church that gets tangled up in the minutiae.
- May we be a church that responds positively to the promise of the Father, positioning ourselves to be a mouthpiece, proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world.