

January 27, 2008

Isaiah 42:1-4 / John 1:29-34 / Luke 3:15-20

Luke (#7) - Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the Baptism that Really Matters

I need to begin this morning's message by telling you that no matter how I interpret this passage, or the experience of the Holy Spirit Luke alludes to in this passage, I will have some nodding in agreement, and others shaking their heads in disagreement!

I know that. I wish everyone could agree on it, but it's not likely, because no matter which approach one takes on the issue of "The Baptism of, in, or with the Holy Spirit," it will sit well with some, and will not sit well with others. That's simply the way it is, and will continue to be, so long as we remain this side of heaven!

Part of the diversity of opinion on the issue has to do with the way one does biblical interpretation. / Part of it has to do with how one chooses to interpret their own subjective personal experience. / Part has to do with the words, and labels, and descriptions people use to describe those experiences. / A large part has to do with a persons worldview / the presuppositions they hold to / what it is they want to believe from the very outset / the effect they feel a particular position will have on the life of the church or the individuals in it / and of course, there is always loyalty to the denominational background one was raised in.

They all play a big part in determining where one will stand on this issue — which I hope will make us more open to agreeing to disagree in love.

And I won't bother telling you up front what my own view is in regard to the issue, because that will come out as I go on. But I will begin by saying this:

No matter what side of the issue you personally stand on in regard to "The Baptism of, in, or with the Holy Spirit," this much we should all be able to agree on merely by reading and affirming the message of today's text — that whatever the particulars of that experience are, Jesus ministry is clearly distinguished as being different from that of John the Baptist's in this way: John's ministry is primarily one of baptizing people with water. And Jesus ministry is primarily one of baptizing people with the Holy Spirit (or as Luke puts it in verse 16, "with the Holy Spirit and fire").

On this one point every single Gospel is in total, unanimous, indisputable agreement!

You cannot get beyond chapter 3 in any Gospel, without discovering that the unique and unquestionable difference between the ministry of John and the ministry of Jesus is that one merely baptizes people with water, and the other baptizes people with the Holy Spirit. On **THAT** point every single Christian should be in 100% total agreement.

In fact, you need to know that's how John identified Jesus as the Messiah (or Son of God): *"I would not have known Him,"* says John the Baptist in John 1:33. That is, I would not have known He was the Christ, *"except that the One who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is He who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.'"*

And it only makes sense. Jesus was the "*Christ*," and the word "Christ" means "*Anointed One*" — that is, the One anointed with the Holy Spirit! He couldn't have been the Christ if God had not *"put His Spirit upon Him"* (Isaiah 42:1).

And according to all the Gospel writers, God didn't simply "put His Spirit on Him" ("without limit" as we are told in John 3:34), but put it on Him **SO THAT** He might take that same Spirit which He possessed without limit, and impart it to others. An act that Luke describes as "baptizing people with the Holy Spirit and fire."

In fact, upon further investigation we discover that this same exact experience is given other names or descriptions in the New Testament — by the very same author!

In Acts 1:4 Luke calls it, *"Receiving the gift the Father promised."* In the very next verse (Acts 1:5) he refers to it as being, *"baptized in or with the Holy Spirit."* In verse 8 he refers to it as, *"receiving power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you."* In chapter 2 verse 4 he calls it being *"filled with the Holy Spirit."* And in Acts 2:17, quoting chapter 2 verse 28 from the Prophet Joel, the Apostle Peter calls it the fulfillment of the OT promise that, *"In the last days God would pour out His Spirit upon all flesh."*

So what are they? Five ways of describing five different experiences? NO! They are five different ways of describing the exact same experience! And that's important to remember as we continue on in our study.

Receiving the Holy Spirit / receiving power when the Spirit comes upon you / being filled with the Holy Spirit / the outpouring of the Holy Spirit / and the baptism of the Holy Spirit / all refer to one and the same experience! Remember that!

So, that's how John would identify Jesus as being the Christ — He would see the Holy Spirit come down upon Jesus (visibly — in the form of a dove — which we'll consider next week).

But that's also how he identified Him as the one who would fulfill the prophesied Messianic charge of pouring it out on others: ***“For the One who sent me to baptize with water told me: ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is He who would baptize with the Holy Spirit.’”***

Yet you know what I've found kind of sad? Whereas the New Testament itself places such an adamant stress on the fact that Christian experience includes the experience of receiving, being filled with or baptized with the Holy Spirit; the emphasis in the church at large has sort of reverted back to being much more like John's baptism — a somewhat perfunctory, sacramental, physical ritual of baptism in or with water — with very little emphasis on the baptism, infilling or reception of the Holy Spirit.

Today (in most church circles) baptism focuses almost exclusively on being immersed in water, rather than being immersed in the Holy Spirit! It's a baptism of having water poured over us, rather than having the Holy Spirit poured out upon us or into us! Whereas the Bible stresses the need to be baptized in the Spirit, the church has often stressed little more than the need to be baptized in water.

And I'm not trouncing water baptism in any way! I constantly admonish people to receive it. But in the total scheme of things baptism with the Spirit is far more important than baptism with water, and to change or reverse that order is to go totally against the testimony of the Bible. You **CAN** get to heaven without being baptized with water (the thief on the cross is clear, indisputable proof of that); but you **CANNOT** get to heaven if you have not received, been filled with, regenerated by, or baptized in the Holy Spirit.

In fact, that's what the “baptism with the Holy Spirit” is (as far as we can tell from Scripture) — it's the **INITIAL** outpouring of the Holy Spirit into one's life with saving, sealing, gracious, life-transforming and life-invigorating power.

To “baptize” means to initiate — to do or use something for the very first time. It's to be the first one to “break something in.” We still use the term in that sense today.

Baptism with the Spirit, therefore, is not a secondary experience for *SOME* Christians, but the first, the initial, the inaugural experience *ALL TRUE CHRISTIANS* have with the Holy Spirit.

That's why Paul, speaking in a general way to all the believers in Corinth (to some who spoke in tongues and some who did not) can say in I Corinthians 12:13: *"For we were ALL baptized by one Spirit into one body —whether Jew or Gentile, slave or free — and we were all given the one Spirit to drink."*

In other words, if you're truly a Christian, Paul says, *YOU HAVE BEEN BAPTIZED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT — "For we were ALL baptized by one Spirit into one body."*

It's the experience of *ALL TRUE CHRISTIANS* and NOT a special, secondary, elevated experience given to only a few, select, super-spiritual Christians! It ISN'T something God withholds from the vast majority of Christians and gives only to a few privileged, special, elite, extremely holy Christians! NOOOOOO!!! Paul says it's the experience of all who truly know Jesus.

That's why you will NEVER find anyone (after Pentecost — and I challenge you to show me otherwise) — you will NEVER find anyone, anywhere in the New Testament ever encouraging people who are already Christians to pray for, or seek the baptism with the Spirit!

WHY? Because people who are truly Christian have already received it, and you don't pray to receive what you've already received!

Now it's true that was not the case with the disciples. Their baptism in the Spirit WAS a secondary experience of the Spirit. But that's because they lived in the in between time — the time between the two testaments, when the Holy Spirit was present, but had not yet been poured out in fulfillment of Joel's prophecy.

In fact, to say that our experience must mimic that of the disciples is to set before us an impossibility, because we live post-Pentecost ! And as my professor Gordon Fee (who was an ordained Pentecostal Assemblies of God pastor) once said, *"Comparing our experience to that of the disciples is like trying to compare oranges and apples. You just can't do it!"* We live post-Pentecost, and they lived pre-Pentecost, and we can't go back in time to experience the Spirit in the same way they did before it was poured out!

It's no wonder then, that when Paul sees the Galatian believers going astray, and wants to pull them back, He asks them to reflect back on their initial, saving, Christian experience in chapter 3 verse 2, and says:

"I would like to learn just one thing from you: When you received the Spirit, was it by obeying the law, or by believing what you heard?"

You see, Paul assumes that every person in the church in Galatia will be able to recall that event, when it took place, and how it took place — because he goes on to suggest that if they remember the event or experience correctly — they will remember that it occurred as they simply believed what they heard and not while they were trying to obey some facet of the moral or ceremonial law.

He's asking them to think back of the day, or the moment they became a Christian. Yet in doing so what event does he ask them to remember? The day or moment they received the Spirit. He assumes they will all be able to remember that experience vividly (granting you it had only been 3-5 years since it had taken place).

Yet, to show you how much the emphasis in the church has changed over the years, I dare say that if we (unlike the Apostle Paul) were to ask people to reflect back to their initial experience as a Christian, or recall the day they became a Christian, we'd probably ask something like this:

"Remember the day you prayed the sinners prayer?" "Remember the day you asked Jesus to be Lord of your life." Remember the day you committed your life to Jesus?" "The day you went forward at that crusade" / "The day you raised your hand at that rally" / "The day you gave your heart to Jesus" / "The day you filled out that decision card" / and so forth and so on.

But very few of us, I dare say, would speak of our "conversion" in terms of being the day we received the Holy Spirit. Few of us would ever say: *"Yes, I remember — it was the day the Holy Spirit came upon me; filled me; came to indwell me; baptized me; sealed me; and saved my soul by imparting to me the divine nature! Yes, I remember now."* It's not an experience one has after conversion, it's the experience that converts us!

So, maybe in light of our passage from Luke, and Paul's question in Galatians 3:2, I could ask you the same thing: *"When YOU received the gift the Father promised / were filled, baptized or indwelt by the Holy Spirit — Where were you and what were you doing?"*

Because Paul's point is that you probably weren't "doing" anything, except hearing the Gospel preached. And as you listened, the Holy Spirit extended to you His inward effectual call / raised you from your spiritual death in trespasses and sins and made you alive with Christ / regenerated your soul / baptized you into Christ / and made your body His new home — sealing, empowering, gifting, and saving you." You DO remember that day, don't you? Paul would ask.

You see, Christian experience begins when we experience the infilling of the Holy Spirit. It centers upon that initial baptism with the Holy Spirit and is followed (for the rest of our lives), by a continual, ongoing, daily dependence upon and communion with that same Holy Spirit.

Yet how many unbelievers are aware that that is the primary, initial experience of the Christian life? How many unbelievers are taught, or know, that being a Christian means being baptized, gifted and empowered by the Holy Spirit — washed and sealed and sanctified and set apart for God by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit?

How many people know that being a Christian means being a living, walking, breathing, talking, feeling, animated physical and psychical body into whom God's Spirit has come to take up residence?

I was never told that when I grew up! In fact, in the church circles I was raised in I got the distinct impression the Holy Spirit was something to be avoided! It was a taboo topic! People really didn't want the Spirit to manifest Himself in powerful and persuasive ways in the church.

I got the distinct impression that Christian life consisted of being good, moral, upright, church going people; people who believed the Bible, affirmed right doctrines, and had a disciplined devotional and prayer life, but unlike the people in the Bible, did not have experiences with the Holy Spirit.

Even when preachers used **Acts 2:38** in their evangelistic appeals, they usually quoted the first half of v. 38 ("**Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins**"), but failed to quote the second half: "**And you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise is for you and your children, and all who are far off — for all whom the Lord our God will call.**" It's a promise to all who will ever come to faith in Christ!

As a child and teenager I never knew that, which led me to believe that Christianity had lost something over the years. It had become more a matter of correct head knowledge and conservative morality, and less a matter of experiencing the supernatural power and life-transforming presence of the Holy Spirit.

From all appearances (to me as a teenager), it seemed there was nothing very supernatural Church, whereas when I read my Bible the early church seemed saturated in the supernatural power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

In fact, when I did hear any experience of the Holy Spirit spoken about, it was usually in the past tense. *“That was back then,”* they would say. / *“That stopped around 100 A.D.,”* they would say. / *“That was for the dispensation of the Spirit,”* they would say.

Some even said: *“Yes, Jesus baptized the disciples in the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, but He never promised to continue baptizing every individual that comes to Christ in the Spirit, as if each individual could or should expect their own personal Pentecost.”*

Not only that, I even got the distinct impression that what mattered most in regard to “baptism” was the right method of the application of water to the body (be it by sprinkling, pouring or immersion) — instead of the application of the Spirit to the soul — which is what the Bible shows to be the most important!

You see, you can be baptized in water any way you want, but if you have not been baptized in, or with the Holy Spirit it was all for nothing! Because when it comes right down to it, that’s the only Baptism that really matters in the end! You can be saved apart from being baptized with water (as the thief on the cross indisputably proves), but you cannot be saved apart from receiving or being baptized with the Holy Spirit.

It’s the coming of the Holy Spirit into a person’s being that convicts the conscience of sin, and extends the effectual call, and regenerates the soul, and liberates the sinner from the dominion of sin, and sanctifies the spirit, and renews the heart and transforms the mind, and changes one’s life! It’s the Spirit that saves us! Not so with baptism in water!

That’s why Paul can say in Romans 8:9, *“And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ (another name for the Holy Spirit) he does not belong to Christ.”* That is, if a person does not have the Holy Spirit, they are not a Christian, whatever else they may be!

Therefore, let me conclude by leaving you with **THREE** short observations and challenges.

FIRST, as much as it may not be something you think of often, I'd like to ask you to do what our passage for this morning does so clearly — which is to introduce you to Jesus, from the very outset, as being the one whose primary task, after living and dying and rising from the dead and ascending into heaven, would be to pour out His Holy Spirit or baptize all flesh with the Holy Spirit, beginning with the apostles and disciples, but not ending there since the promise of forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit, as Peter states in Acts 2:39 is ***“to all whom the Lord our God will call.”***

Contrary to the opinion of **SOME** who de-emphasize the role, and indispensable activity of the Holy Spirit in the present day church (making Christianity little more than a religion of right notions and right morals), let us re-emphasize the fact that Jesus' Messianic charge is, and always will be this side of glory, to baptize people with the Holy Spirit.

Jesus will not stop baptizing people with the Spirit until every last one of God's elect is brought into the fold of God. Jesus, was, and will remain until the Second Coming, the Christ who was anointed with, and continues to baptize people with the Holy Spirit.

Which brings me to my **SECOND** point. That although the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost was in some ways a one time non-repeatable event (it was the initial outpouring and there can't be other initial outpourings! It was attended by physical manifestations like the audible sound of a mighty wind coming down from heaven, and the visible tongues of fire that rested upon each person), there are other ways in which Pentecost must be repeated in the life of every saved person or they cannot ever be saved!

When Paul said of all believers that ***“We have ALL been baptized by one Spirit into one body,”*** he was describing the experience of every last person who would ever come to faith in Christ!

Because he knew so well what we also should know: ***That no one can come to Christ apart from the supernatural power, presence, and influences of the Holy Spirit. Christianity is not simply an expression of culture or conservative morality. It's a supernatural religion, which clearly teaches that apart from the supernatural and miraculous influences of the Holy Spirit, no one would ever become Christian, nor could they ever live the Christian life!***

There could be no real life, or faith, or spiritual vitality, or hope, or help, or love, or zeal, or healing, or conversions, or comfort or kingdom advancement!

In fact, if we give people the impression that they **CAN** become Christian apart from the miracles of grace wrought in the heart and mind of man by the influences of the Holy Spirit, then we betray our faith, contradict the Bible, and make the ministry of Jesus as Spirit-baptizer, both irrelevant and unnecessary.

Then **LAST**, I want to encourage you, as Paul does, not to grieve, or quench, or put out the Spirit's fire, but rather, as he said to Timothy, *"fan it into flames."* *"Understand,"* says Paul in Eph. 5:17, *what the Lord's will is: 'Do not be drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery, but instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit.'*

And the word *"filled"* there is a word which means *"to fill up a lack or deficiency,"* or *"to possess something fully or completely."* And as I've also mentioned before, the Greek phrase Paul uses there translates somewhat awkwardly into English. It's a present passive imperative that means *"let yourselves be being filled."* Or, *"let yourselves continue or keep being filled with the Holy Spirit."*

So, does a believer pray to be baptized with the Spirit? NO! But can they pray for renewed fillings? It sure seems so according to Eph. 5:17 and Acts 4:31. / Are there things we need to do to ensure we don't put out the Spirit's fire?" Paul says there are in I Thess. 5:19. / If we can do things that grieve the Spirit or quench the Spirit (the imagery there being that of taking water and throwing it on a fire) then are there things we can do to fan the fire of the Spirit into flames? So it seems, according to Eph. 4:30 / 5:18-20 / II Tim. 1:6.

HOW? By **TURNING** from the unholy or sinful things that grieve or quench the Spirit's fire.

By **MOVING BEYOND** our fears in regard to the Spirit's activity and presence.

By **FREEING OURSELVES** from unhealthy inhibitions.

And by **PRAYING** that God would remove from our being **ANYTHING** that would diminish the Spirit's power, presence, and effectiveness.

These are many of the ways we can fan into flames the gift of the Spirit that we received.