

The Resurrection Series: The Holy Spirit in the Acts of the Apostles...

Introduction:

I want to share with you this morning on the Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts, before we leave the Resurrection series. We have come to understand the importance of the Resurrection in our walk of faith with God. Jesus is alive, resurrected from the dead cannot be over-emphasized. The Bible tells us that if the resurrection of Jesus did not happen then our preaching and faith are useless. However, we know that Jesus is alive and that he has appeared to thousands upon thousands of believers over the centuries. As well, the power of the Spirit was given to confirm that Jesus was alive - and that the Spirit was given to the disciples for the furthering of the Kingdom of God. Acts 2 is such a powerful demonstration of the Spirit's energy being released upon the disciples giving birth to the New Testament Church.

The Acts of the Apostles could easily be described as the Acts of the Holy Spirit. We will see the significance of this as we look into the Book of Acts we will discover the ongoing ministry of the Holy Spirit. We must remember that the Spirit of God is not an experience or a manifestation of power but is the Third Person of the Trinity; God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

We know that the Scripture gives various descriptions to the Holy Spirit such as the Creator, the Comforter and the Counsellor and the Teacher. Last week we stopped at the out-pouring of the Spirit of God on the Day of Pentecost. Now let's look forward in the Book of Acts and see the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit in Acts:

As we get started there are several things I believe necessary to consider. For the most part, we are fairly aware and comfortable our relationship with Jesus our Saviour. After all, he was flesh and blood just like you and me. We can fully identify ourselves with him because he is just like us, and yet without sin. This pure and spotless Lamb of God totally fulfilled his purpose on earth and through his life, death and resurrection has now ascended to the right hand of God. In other words, Jesus is no longer in direct contact with us.

Another point to consider is this, Jesus came to point the way to the Father and actually stated, **“no one comes to the Father except through me.”** Jesus introduced us to his Father in heaven not on earth. If Jesus taught us to pray to “his father” some may have thought we were to pray to Joseph. But no – we are to be in personal relationship with “our Father who is in heaven”. He taught us how to relate to and pray to our Father who art in heaven. Jesus directed us to our Father and taught us to know the Love of our Father while we live on earth.

However, when it comes to the Holy Spirit there is confusion and contention within the Body of Christ. Some believe in the Spirit but not the Gifts of the Spirit. Others call speaking in tongues demonic while others say if you don't speak in tongues you are not saved. Some churches "preach the Word" while other churches "speak the language of the Spirit. Today I am not attempting to resolve these discrepancies, but to reveal the person and the work of the Spirit in the Book of Acts.

The Holy Spirit was given to commune with the church:

Over and over in the Scriptures we realize the desire of God for intimate relationship; whether it is the Father and the Son cherishing each other or the personal connection between Jesus and his disciples. The concept of communion involves personal conversation where our thoughts and emotions are poured out in friendship. There is a sense of community with others who have a like desire and passion for God.

In the Greek, the word for fellowship is koinonia, which refers to associating in community and carries with it the expressions of the intimate relationship mentioned above. But in addition koinonia also describes intercourse and or sexual intimacy. In other words, without this intimacy there is no spiritual birth or life, no faith or power. However, the Holy Spirit has become the source for these genuine expressions of intimacy and has given birth to the church. This is not a licence for sexual sin in the church, but a revealing of the relationship between the Holy Spirit and you and me. The Holy Spirit is all about intimacy and not outward religious formalities.

The Book of Acts reveals the communing of the Holy Spirit amongst the church in several passages.

Acts 2:42-47 - They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Acts 4:32-37 - All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. ³³ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. ³⁴ There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵ and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need. ³⁶ Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), ³⁷ sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

In contrast Acts 5 reveals the danger of lying to the Holy Spirit in times of such holy fellowship. **"Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. ² With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet. ³ Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?"**

The Holy Spirit was given to empower the church to be witnesses:

One of the primary works of the Holy Spirit is to partner with believers in Christ. This partnership can be defined in numerous ways:

- Firstly, we see ourselves as a company of believers filled with the Holy Spirit and fearlessly preaching the Gospel.
Acts 1:8 and Acts 2...

Peter preaches under the out-pouring power of the Spirit a holy sermon with Holy Spirit bookends.

Acts 2:17-18 - “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. ¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.

Acts 2:37-39 - When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” ³⁸ Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

We again see Peter, “**filled with the Holy Spirit**” (Acts 4:8) – preaching with boldness to the Jewish spiritual leaders. His preaching is accompanied with persecution and yet when the believers gather together in prayer, “**the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly**” (Acts 4:31). The powerful truth here is simple; the disciples were again filled with the Spirit, not a one-time experience, but an ongoing relationship with the Spirit.

- Secondly, just as Jesus was about his Father’s business, so the disciples now join God’s work.

In Acts 6 we see the disciples getting down to the practical work of the Gospel. The Grecian Jewish widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. The Apostles gathered together the disciples and set apart certain men to take care of this church business. “**They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit**” (Acts 6:5).

This partnership describes a joint venture. The Holy Spirit does his part and we do our part. This same Stephen went on to witness on behalf of Jesus and gave up his life as a glorious offering – “**Stephen full of the Holy Spirit looked up to heaven... While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit”** (Acts 7:55, 59).

In Acts 8 Simon the sorcerer wanted to pay money for the power of the Holy Spirit. Also in Acts 8 we see Phillip’s leading the Ethiopian eunuch to the Lord and baptizing him. “**When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Phillip away...**”

In Acts 9 we read about Saul’s radical conversion. Later on the reluctant Ananias is sent by God so that Saul “**may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit** (Acts 9:17).

Acts 10 reveals to us the story of Cornelius and Peter, both of which encounter the power of the Spirit through visions. Peter goes to Cornelius's house and preaches up another powerful message. **"While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message.** ⁴⁵ **The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles.** ⁴⁶ **For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said,** ⁴⁷ **"Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have."** ⁴⁸ **So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days (Acts 10:44-46).** Peter follows this encounter up with the apostles and other leaders throughout Judea in Acts 11 by stating **"if God gave then the same gift as he gave us... could I oppose God"**. Sometimes the Holy Spirit overrides our understanding of theology; in other words the Jewish believers thought the Holy Spirit was only for Jews.

Acts 13:1-4 – "In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. ² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. ⁴ The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit..." One of Paul's first encounters was with another sorcerer named Elymas. Paul confronted him **"filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 13:9)**. The sorcerer goes blind but others come to faith in Jesus.

The missionary journey continues and **"The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. ⁵⁰ But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. ⁵¹ So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. ⁵² And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:49-52).**

Again we see the Holy Spirit guiding the Apostles and disciples in the Father's business...
Acts 15:28 - "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us..."

Acts 16:6 – "Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia."

Acts 20:22-23 - "And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. ²³ I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me.

Acts 21:10-11 – "After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹ Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.' "

In Conclusion:

As we have looked briefly at the Book of Acts this morning, we have been seen the importance of the Holy Spirit in the life of the early church. Without the Holy Spirit coming upon the disciples there would not be a community of believers. The person and work of Jesus is clearly seen in the Gospels and there is no doubt as to his purpose as the Messiah. The same must be true of the Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts. Jesus is no longer with us in the flesh, as he ascended to the right hand of the Father. However, the effect of the Spirit's power coming upon the early disciples was to be as significant as God becoming flesh. Now the Spirit of God was filling the lives of lovers of God. In other words, God was becoming flesh through the disciples to the world.

Let's ask ourselves a number of searching questions.

How is your fellowship (intimate communion) with the Holy Spirit today?

- We must acknowledge that the Spirit is present in the church and we must welcome the Spirit.
- We must embrace intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit not indecisive religion. We are not forsaking the Father or the Son but intentionally accepting the Spirit of God.

Secondly, how is our partnership with the Holy Spirit really doing?

As followers of Jesus we must obediently engage in relationship with the Holy Spirit. This involves an empowering of the Spirit for the sake of Kingdom life and ministry.

- We can see from the writings in Acts that we should always seek first guidance from the Holy Spirit.
- We must be willing to be filled with the Spirit's power and boldness and be obedient to his divine opportunities.
- When we are filled, bold and obedient to the Holy Spirit, only then can the gospel really be preached. I believe it is the power of the Spirit that is desperately missing in the church today.

If we try to do church without the Spirit we are no better off than the Pharisees and Sadducees of Jesus day. Such a partnership with the Spirit of God is indispensable to the contemporary church.

2 Cor 13:14 - May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.