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The Church Alive – The Unfinished Work of Christ – The Power for Persuasive Proclamation (Part 1) Acts 1:4-8

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It is easy for certain things in life to be lightly regarded or undervalued. Sometimes, in financial circles, a certain company's stock may be said to be undervalued, meaning that because of the company's performance and success, it is actually worth more than many people are recognizing. At that point your investment representative may encourage you to buy that stock; or, in other words, to value that stock and invest in it.

Sometimes we may undervalue or under appreciate certain friends or loved ones in our lives; taking them for granted. When we come to realize this, what do we do? We begin to invest ourselves once again into that relationship.

It is possible to undervalue God and the activity of God in our lives. The scriptures remind us in Lamentations 3:22-23 that, **"22 The Lord's lovingkindnesses [or tender mercies] indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail. 23 They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness."** Here we are reminded that everything we have is a mercy of God; but how often do we forget that these are undeserved and therefore we undervalue them. Let us be aware of God and His continual presence; of His fantastic forgiveness and of His glorious grace to call us to Himself by faith in Jesus Christ.

But this morning I wish to present to you perhaps the most undervalued person in each of our lives; that person being the Holy Spirit of God. How quickly and easily we can forget that apart from the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, we are nothing and can do nothing of consequence for the glory of God. The Holy Spirit is key to our salvation (John 3:3-5), to our understanding of God and His promises (1 Corinthians 2:10-14), to our being able to please God with our lives (Romans 8:5-9); to our increasing in Christlikeness in contrast to living as a mere worldling (Galatians 5:16-25) and, as we will see in our text this morning, the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential in empowering us for effective, meaningful and delightful evangelism (Acts 1:8).

In other words, if we are called to make disciples (Matthew 28:19) and to go into all the world proclaiming the gospel to all creation (Mark 16:15), what is it that makes all our efforts, all our preparations, indeed all our proclamations of any consequence to the glory of God and the expansion of Christ's kingdom – what is it that guarantees that our mission will be successful in bringing either conversion – salvation to those who believe; or condemnation – judgment upon those who disbelieve? Beloved; what brings such a success is the power of God in you; through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

According to our text this morning, we learn that apart from the empowering of the Spirit, we cannot be adequate witnesses for Jesus Christ. We must not undervalue the need and power

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of the Spirit of God in our lives. We must be constantly experiencing the power and presence of the Holy Spirit to share effectively the message of Jesus Christ to the world.

Such a statement would seem to "go without saying" – and yet what we know in our heads is often not the experience of our lives. Our whole Christian experience begins with the baptism of the Holy Spirit whereby we are brought into the family of God and made members of the Body of Christ, the Church (1 Corinthians 12:13) and continues with the filling or empowering of the Spirit of God for effective service (Ephesians 5:18). Can we take this essential need of the Holy Spirit in evangelism and authentic Christian living for granted? Too easily. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones once asked his congregation a question. He said, *"I want to talk to you today about the baptism of the Holy Spirit. You may call it what you want, but I want to know, have you experienced the fullness of the Spirit? I know all of you listening to me come as I do from a Reformed background. But it's not good enough. I know that all of you would want to say to my question about the Holy Spirit, 'Well, we got it all at conversion; there's no need for any more experience.' Well," said Lloyd-Jones, "I have only one other question to ask you. If you got it all at conversion, where in God's name is it?"*

The power and presence of the Holy Spirit in our conversion and in our continued consecration to God is to be making a sustained, meaningful, demonstrable difference in our lives. If the Holy Spirit of God is truly of God; then His presence in us and among us ought to be supernatural, extraordinary, life-changing and utterly unlike anything experienced anywhere else in this life. The late pastor and author A.W. Tozer gave a stinging indictment of the modern Church when he said, *"If the Holy Spirit were withdrawn from the church today, 95% of what we do would go on and no one would know the difference."* Let us pray to be in the 5%, a people whose lives are so marked by the working of the Spirit of God that both we and the world knows something supernatural is taking place; not for showy excitement and emotional appeals, but for a deep heartfelt conviction –

- *of the sinfulness of sin,
- *of the dread fear of God,
- *of the awesome peril of eternity lost,
- *of the crying need for obedience and surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ,
- *of a contagious, overwhelming, overflowing love for people eternal state, and
- *of a heart for God and the things of God.

This represents the working of the Spirit within the hearts of the people of God; those who would be effective in sharing the message of Jesus Christ. Let us never undervalue the power and presence of the Spirit of God. From the five verses of our text, let me point out four truths that when considered and applied to our lives, will prevent us from undervaluing the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit. It is by such truths we come to experience the power of the Holy Spirit. Let me walk you through these key truths. The last of these keys is found in verse 8 and we will look at that one by itself next week. So what are the first three keys in experiencing the fullness of the power of the Spirit? To begin with, we come to experience the power of the Spirit...

1. In the gathering of the church (1:4a)

We first in our text the opening words of verse 4, ***"Gathering them together..."*** If we are to experience the fullness of the Spirit of God, it begins with believers in Jesus Christ purposely, intentionally, consistently coming together.

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As we progress in the events of Acts, let me remind you of what has happened. Jesus has been crucified and raised from the dead. He has already appeared to many of the disciples. For the past forty days He spoke to them about the Kingdom of God. And shortly He will be taken up into Heaven. No doubt there would be yet many questions, many concerns, and many anxieties. How would this ministry to which Jesus was calling them, to go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation (Mark 16:15) ever be accomplished. These were simple men, fearful men, and untrained men. What would ever make Jesus think these apostles could turn the world upside down? Jesus knew these men would turn the world upside down because He knew what the divine plan was and had been reminding them of this plan as well now telling them by what means, what resource this plan would be executed. In order to do this, our text tells us that He gathered them together. The verb "gathering" means to throng together; or, if I might say it another way, to huddle close together. Here we have a picture of the fellowship of the saints; of believers coming together for the purpose obedience to and instruction by the Lord. Now take a close look at these words and answer for me a question; who has initiated this gathering, the apostles or the Lord Jesus Christ? Our text is clear; this gathering is called by the Lord. In fact, we can translate this phrase to say that Jesus, *"gathering them together to Himself, by Himself and for Himself commanded them..."* Jesus calls His people together for the purpose of experiencing the fullness of the Spirit of God. By way of application then, we need to remember that the church is not simply to be seen as people who voluntarily gather themselves to worship and learn of the Lord – this sounds good; but it is not the most accurate as the church is to be first a people who are gathered together by Christ for the purpose of worship and learning of the Lord.

In Hebrews 10:25 we read the exhortation, ***"not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near."*** This is a clear command for believers to willingly and purposely gather themselves together so that they will not undervalue the rest of the saints, or the church. Why? Because the gathering of the believers is the first step toward experiencing the fullness of the Spirit of God. But why do believers even consider coming together in the first place? The gather in the first place because they have been called or summoned by Jesus to do so.

Let me illustrate the idea for you this way, borrowing from a football motif. Not to be profane with Jesus, but He is likened to the quarterback of the team. As the team takes the field, He calls, or gathers the players together, tells them the plan, the hike count, and everything necessary for play and they say, "Break". From there the players scatter their respective, appointed, positions in the field and are to execute the quarterback plan on His signal. I know we sometimes cringe at the label, "the holy huddle" as it so often suggests believers coming together only to hide from the field of play, not to engage in the game. But here Jesus calls a true holy huddle; the saints gathered together around Him, to learn of the play and to execute it in the field or the world.

What would you call a player who does not make it to the huddle? Certainly not a team player. And when that player does not know either the play or how the rest of the team plans to execute that play, he does more damage than good for the team. As we will see from the progression of our text, the first step to experience the fullness of the Spirit is to know you have been called by Jesus into the huddle. I would hope you would come quickly; excitedly, preparedly, timely and ready to receive instruction from the Lord.

To put this in blunt language then, whenever it is in your power and your control to partake in the huddle, no matter how tired, broken, sick or bruised you may be, you have been called by Jesus to the gathering. It is not the pastor who calls you; nor the elders, or even the

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congregation; although they may as will; but ultimately it is Christ who calls His own into the huddle. To forsake the huddle then is to undervalue Christ, it is to undervalue the people He has redeemed, and it is to undervalue His Holy Spirit who, as we will see, becomes the energy, resource and enablement for each of us to execute the plan of the Lord Jesus. To experience the fullness of the Spirit requires your faithful, ongoing, consistent participation in the various holy huddles of the church.

It is God who has made us members one of another. It is God who has given us to one another as an inheritance, as gifts. Love how Milton Vincent, in the Gospel Primer, states it saying, *"We are significant players in each other's gospel narrative, and it is in relationship with one another that we experience the fullness of God in Christ."* How do we experience the fullness of God and of His Spirit in Christ, by being in relationship, as believers, gathered by Christ, with one another. Vincent goes on to add, *"Hence, the more I comprehend the full scope of the gospel, the more I value the church for which Christ died, the more I value the role that I play in the lives of my fellow-Christians, and the more I appreciate the role that they must be allowed to play in mine."* Let us lovingly and longingly be gathered together by Christ to one another so that we might experience the fullness of the Spirit among us.

2. In waiting upon the Lord (1:4b-5)

In addition to being the church gathered, the next step then, as we are gathered is seen in our waiting upon the Lord. As we wait upon the Lord, we prepare ourselves to receive the fullness of the Spirit's power. As we read again and along in verse four,

4 Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

The command given to the disciples was simple. Jesus said they must "wait." What a strange command that must have been. If the gospel accounts teach us anything about the character of many of the disciples, whether it be Peter, James, John or even Judas, is that these could be impulsive men. Sometimes they were impulsive with good motives, sometimes with not so good ones. As they have spent forty days with the resurrected Lord, hearing all this talk about the kingdom of God, I have no doubt that they were thinking to some extent, "Okay, we can do this, let's get on with this. Jesus, the King of the Kingdom is risen from the dead, let's make that message known. We can do it! And so began the first church growth seminar as these men began to formulate in their mind how they would accomplish the task. And in the midst of all this creative excitement, Jesus says what? Jesus says wait. But why did they need to wait? Because as simple as speaking to people about Jesus seemed, the only way for that message to be effective if it was bathed in the power of the Holy Spirit. So, the command to wait! But waiting is not the easiest thing to do, is it? Whether we are waiting for something good, or for something bad, we hate to wait. It is hard to wait for the results of a test; for help in a time of need; or for the oil on the car to be changed at the shop. It can be agonizing to wait for someone in surgery as the minutes can seem like hours. And so I must tell you, that regardless of how spiritual you are, waiting on the Lord can be the most difficult kind of waiting that exists. But Jesus said wait, wait for guidance and direction. Wait for divine enablement and power. Beloved, it was only by waiting and seeking God that the apostles would find the promise of God to be real. As they

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waited, they would be met by God. And the same is true for us, we must wait on and pray to the Lord; and as we do, we will be met by God.

And in our text to be met by God is the promise. Jesus knows every need. He knew every need of the apostles and He knows our very needs. And in our needs there is always the promise of His provision for those needs. Do you believe this? Paul did, saying to the Philippians, **"And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (4:19).** I suspect that most of us have some circumstances or issues in our lives that would be greatly aided by God's supply. Sometimes we find ourselves questioning God in things, finding it impossible to understand how even He could make something right or bring something good into our lives. Sometimes we find ourselves confused as everything seems to be going well, but there is some underlying gnawing of discontentment. We all so quickly say that we desire more of Jesus in our lives; more dedicated service to Him and yet we can struggle with how to obtain it. Beloved, there is a promise for us and it is the same promise that these apostles received. What is that promise? It is the promise of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit in our lives, a divine enablement whereby we love to live for God.

In the gospel of John, we read that Jesus would have to go away, but that when He did go away, He would send us "another Helper." (14:16; 26) who is identified as the Holy Spirit. Let us not undervalue the Spirit as He is the promised gift of our Heavenly Father to every believer in Christ. We learn that it is through His indwelling presence in our lives that we are connected to God. In John 16:7 Jesus said, **"it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you."** Just how is it to our advantage that Jesus, the Lord of life and the Prince of peace go away? As we have noted before; the glory of the coming of Christ is captured in the name, Emmanuel – God with us! But the glory of the coming of the Holy Spirit, would be Christ in us the hope of glory! Every believer has the very life of God living in him. As the "Helper" the Spirit is been given to us to be our power and guide, to help us through every problem, to make the Word of God living and active in us, and to bring to our heart and minds the reality of Jesus as Lord and Savior. As any reader of Acts 1 and 2 reveals, the giving of the Holy Spirit is given to every believer and enables him to live an exciting, dynamic, abundant life to the glory of God. This is the promise given to the early Christians and it is the same promise we have today. How can I say that this promise of the Holy Spirit is for every believer; that we can and should experience the dynamics of His presence in us? In Acts 2:38-39 we read of the Holy Spirit being a gift and then we read, **"For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself."** The Holy Spirit and His power are promised to every believer and the question is, according to Lloyd-Jones, *"...where in God's name is it?"* Are you experiencing the power of the Spirit at work in you?

3. In receiving instruction from the Lord (1:6-7)

6 So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" 7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority;

As we gather, we are to receive instruction or the knowledge of things that the Lord has for us. The apostles wanted to know about the "when" of the coming Kingdom. As fascinating and worthwhile of a study as that is, it is not to be the prime concern. For Jesus gives instruction not concerning the "when" of the Kingdom, but rather of the "how" the Kingdom is to be proclaimed.

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And, as we will see in verse 8, that how is in the power of the Spirit of God within us. Jesus does not want the apostles to be distracted from their first priority, the proclamation of the Jesus.

By way of application, isn't it easy for us to be distracted in fulfilling our call to proclaim Jesus. In passages like Matthew 28:19 and Mark 16:15, the apostles had been given a mandate to proclaim Christ and make disciples. But in verse 6, we find them distracted by and important, but secondary matter when they asked, **“Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?”** At this time, Jesus interests were not simply on the nation of Israel, but upon the nations. They were interested in the restoration and splendor of Israel while Jesus was interested in the salvation of souls. It's not that they had no reason for thinking this way; for the Old Testament is full of promises concerning the restoration of Israel, but as verse 7 reveals, the fulfillment of those promises is not now – for now it will be about proclaiming salvation in Jesus. Jesus tells them, **“It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority.”** The words “times” and “epochs” are the two common Greek words for time, with the first implying a period of time or duration and the second implying a point of time or an event. Jesus essentially told the disciples, “I want you to mind your own business, the business of proclaiming the gospel. The Father will take care of His business according to what He has decreed in His own timing.”

Let us not fault the apostles for asking the question they did. It was a good theological question. The point is that even in good things, like the study of future things, we can be distracted from the more important things. We must be careful in the labors we perform for God and the church, in our efforts to help others and in our diligence to understand truth if in those things we neglect the work of proclaiming the gospel. In other words, if we get so hung up in our studies and conversations as to how and when Jesus is coming again that we neglect to preach repentance from sin and forgiveness in Jesus, we have lost our primary focus. Let us preach Christ and Him crucified. This does not mean we are not to study and seek to understand other truths of Scriptures, it is rather that these other truths must never usurp the primacy of proclaiming the gospel.

Beloved, let us never forget that you and I are *ambassadors for Christ to the world*. We are to represent the message of our King, who is calling people to faith in His work on the cross for their deliverance from the wages of their sin. We are ambassadors for the eternal kingdom, one that is spiritual in nature, one that demands a new birth to enter into, one that will have a future, earthly manifestation, but that is yet to come. I urge you brethren, not to become distracted from your focus as ambassadors for Christ and His kingdom! If we are to experience the fullness of the Spirit, let us heed the instruction and teaching of the Lord.

Proverbs 2:6 declares, **“For the Lord gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding.”** As we gather together, we do so to have our priorities checked and to receive direction from the Lord. By this we can experience the fullness of the working of the Spirit.

So then, we have noted the first three steps in experiencing the fullness of the Spirit in our lives; first, to remember we have been gathered by Jesus into the body of Christ; second, in waiting upon the Lord, waiting for His promises; and finally in receiving instruction from the Lord. As we take these steps, we will be on our way to experiencing the fullness of the Spirit and will reduce the possibility of our undervaluing the Spirit.

As I close then, let me give you some practical exhortations as to how you can avoid undervaluing the Spirit of God. These are adapted from the great Scottish churchman and poet, Horatius Bonar of the 1800's.

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1. Purposely acknowledge the Holy Spirit and His work. As the third person of the Trinity, He is equal with the Father and the Son and is to be worshiped. Never overlook the Spirit, or undervalue either His power or His love. Never forget His great work in the Church and in individual souls. Without His almighty hand there is no conversion, no faith, no repentance, no saving knowledge. Let those who deny His work, or explain it as a mere influence, or affirm that it is nothing but the effect of the Word upon us, consider how much they are dishonoring the Spirit, and how near they may be approaching to the sin against the Holy Spirit.
2. Prize the Holy Spirit, as the gift of the glorified Christ. He is the promise of the Father; He is the gift of the Son; and in Him are wrapped all other gifts for sinners. He is in the hand of Christ for us, let us go to Christ for Him; for Christ is exalted a Prince and a Savior to give repentance and forgiveness, through the shedding down of the Holy Spirit upon us. We need not fear a refusal from such a Savior.
3. Purpose not to grieve or quench the Holy Spirit. Israel's great sin was their ***"resisting the Holy Spirit"*** (Acts 7:51). ***"But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit"*** (Isaiah 63:10). Let us beware of Israel's sin. O grieve not the Spirit, by your unbelief or hardness of heart! He will not always strive with you.
4. Receive Jesus Christ of whom the Holy Spirit testifies. His office is to glorify Christ; to show Christ. He is willing to do this for sinners. He wants to show you your need of Christ. He wants to show you Christ's sufficiency. He wants to give you true and high thoughts of Christ. Oh, turn not away!
5. Be not scoffers of the Spirit of God – that is, do not make light of God's Spirit. Jesus warned in Matthew 12:31 saying, ***"Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven."*** In other words, do not undervalue the Spirit of God or make light of the true religion of which He is the power. Do not speak evil of Christians who are by Him indwelt; nor circulate reports against the work of God... Beware of everything like irreverence, or levity, or flippancy, in speaking of the things of God or the transactions of eternity. Judge nothing before the time; or if you will judge--see that in your judgment you honor the Spirit of truth and holiness.

Let us not undervalue the Spirit, by whom we have been called together by Jesus, to pray for and wait upon God's promises, to receive instruction in proclaiming the glad tidings of salvation.

Soli Deo Gloria

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