

Bethel Christian Church
Growing in Grace
Studies in the Book of Acts
Study 2

Wait for the promise of the Father
(The Baptism of the Spirit 1)

Have you received the baptism in the Holy Spirit? This has been perhaps the most important yet also divisive question asked by preachers and enthusiastic believers over the past forty years: Especially where speaking in tongues is seen as the only certain proof that the gift has been received. It is the most important question because apart from the Spirit we remain in the desert of our sin, and incapable and unwilling to go with Christ and fill the earth with the Father's glory. It is the most divisive because it is usually asked in an inappropriate way as if it is entry into a special club.

The Father's promise

Any gift that we can receive which is introduced by the true Son as "What the Father has promised" should have us on the edge of our seats with expectation. This was the risen Jesus Christ of Nazareth who knew the Father so well as a human being. Our expectation should be roused on two fronts. The great riches and beauty that the Father's promise will mean for us and the indispensability of the Father's promise for all human beings.

The hangover from sin that plagues all believers is a less than expectant heart about the wonder of the Father's love. Can we see then how great the grace of repentance is? It is not a mere step we do to get Father's blessing. To be left without the true impact of God's Fatherhood on every aspect and moment of life is to be left either sceptical or afraid of his giving. This leaves us captive to fear, superstition and fate. Recall the studies at Bethel on '*My Father is Working*'.

Christ's Expectations

Christ was the man of the Spirit (John 3:34). He was also the dispenser of the Spirit. So no such sloth hindered the heart of Jesus. He knew that the presence of the Spirit was both essential to all he was, said and did as a human being.

- He knew that apart from the Spirit's ministry we remain orphans (John 14:16-18).
And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.¹⁸ I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.
- He knew that apart from the Spirit there would be no fountain of life within a human being (John 7:37-39, see also Jeremiah 2:13; 17:13).
"Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink.³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them."³⁹ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.
- He knew that apart from the Spirit the heart would have no resonance with all that God had accomplished in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus (John 16:14).
¹⁴ He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you.

- He knew that apart from the Spirit we would have nothing in our heart that could be taken to the nations and be used by Christ to fill the nations with the glory of the Father (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.
- He knew that apart from the Spirit there would be no power to experience the harvest of the holy life God supplies to his children (Galatians 5:22-26).
²² *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,* ²³ *gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*
²⁴ *Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.* ²⁵ *Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.*

So the Father’s promise to flood us with his Spirit is only ever full of delight for us and brings the equipping for what is real and reasonable.

So if we are interested in the Baptism of the Spirit in order to get some kind of accreditation then we need to return to repentance in which we are given a whole new comprehension of the Father, his gifts and his giving.

If we are afraid of the Spirit because of manifestations which have fallen outside our comfort zone then we need to think again about who has and is providing the Spirit.

No doubt the established church has often attempted to domesticate the Spirit. We can begin to define the Spirit’s work in terms of what we find comfortable. If we dislike dramatic or unsettling events then we will have a theology of intense order and control. Where we are not phased or even roused by the unexpected and loud and dramatic then all manner of manifestations may be described as the Spirit.

So what did Jesus mean, “The promise of the Father?”

Luke has already told us what he meant in Luke 24:49.

“And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”

The promise of the Father is that his children be “clothed with power from on high”
 The nature of this power is clearly spelled out in Vs 8.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”

This is what God had promised throughout Israel’s history. We have already seen the words of the prophet Joel.

¹⁷ *“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.*

We read in Ezekiel 37 the great irrigating of God’s people and how that formed them into a mighty army.

The starting point was bleak. The whole household of Israel was a desiccated heap of bones. Not only had they lost all sense of form and life but their condition is utterly contradictory to the purpose God had for them amongst the nations. They had become this desolate scene because of the effects of their sin. Sin is a de-spiriting thing. (Illustrate the de-watering process on large wet building sites).

22 *“Therefore say to the Israelites, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: It is not for your sake, people of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone. 23 I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Sovereign LORD, when I am proved holy through you before their eyes.”*

24 *“For I will take you out of the nations; (No good to me there like you are) I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. 25 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. 26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.*

A valley full of dry bones becomes a mighty army

Then God told his servant to prophesy over the bones. No call for a committee to get life back into his people. No sure fired programme from the US to revive church growth. Not even a string of prayer meetings designed to bring God back into activity. God told his servant to preach the word of God to this valley of bones. As he did a rattling occurred. As he spoke sinews and muscle and flesh and skin appeared. But they were still not where God wanted them to be, just bodies lying on the valley floor. He commanded Ezekiel to prophesy again to the Spirit. Then the bodies became alive. Then the bodies stood and became arrayed as a mighty army.

By the Spirit and the Word the house of Israel would become a mighty army. Not a militant, belligerent world power through whom God would subdue the nations. Having received God’s life they would share that life with all people. The aridity of all the nations because of their sin would give way to the Word and the Spirit of God. Those dead in sin would find their bones rattling and flesh forming and life returning.

Isaiah spoke of springs gushing forth in the desert

Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy.

Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.

Or again

For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground;

I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.

According to Jesus, The Father’s promise was fulfilled at Pentecost. His Spirit was poured out upon all flesh. Next week we will explore the significance of this for us.