

**Bethel Christian Church**  
*Growing in Grace*  
Studies in the Book of Acts  
Study 3

***Wait for the promise of the Father***  
(The Baptism of the Spirit 2)

In broad terms we saw last week that the day of Pentecost was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as the Father had promised. It was always to be an extremely significant for Israel and the nations. The fact that it was the Father who promised is highly significant. All Father's gifts are perfect and perfectly given (James 1:17). This means they are most to be desired for both their beauty and their functionality. Of course if, as a hangover of sin and guilt, we have an inappropriate image of the Father then we will be suspicious and fearful of his gifts.

**So what is "The promise of the Father?"**

Jesus had already told them 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 result 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."*

The story of God's emerging Kingdom includes the outpouring of the Spirit. This is what Jesus had recently taught and God had promised throughout Israel's history.

*'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.<sup>18</sup> Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy' (Joel 2:28f).*

To prophesy is to speak out the words that God gives. These words come as God calls the person into his council for counsel. That is they are words only taught in communion with him. The false prophets spoke a word about God which was derived not from his counsel but their own imaginings. In the last days all God's children become prophets. That is the fruit of the Spirit's baptism is to be called into communion with God. This is what Jesus had promised. The Spirit will take what is true for Christ and bring it home to our humanity. Being reconciled to the Father in Christ we may now comprehend his way, words and will. This too was exactly what the Father had promised in connection with the outpouring of the Spirit.

*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. 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. 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. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.*

This promised new heart at the hands of the Spirit is spoken of in the Old Testament in terms of irrigated deserts blooming, national resurrection, and streams in the desert. In other words it is all about life. 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.*

Father promises to transform us from 'self contained dams to well watered gardens' (J Piper).

In Ezekiel 37 God promised to make a mighty army out of his people. Ezekiel saw them in a vision. They were dead, dry and lying on the desert floor. Ezekiel's vision was not an over dramatization. God provided the 'eyes' to see Israel as they truly were.

The starting point of Ezekiel's vision is bleak. The whole household of Israel was a desiccated heap of bones. Not only had they lost all life and form but they lay helpless on the desert floor. The scene was one of total hopelessness. Their condition was utterly contradictory to being the children of God. The vital life of holiness and freedom had been profaned. So God's name had been profaned. Their purpose as God's heralds to the nations was utterly impossible. They could not go to the nations as skeletons. They had become this dead and desolate because of the effects of their sin. Sin is a de-spiriting thing.

Then, in the vision, God told his servant to prophesy over the bones. No committee could be formed to investigate the possibility of get life back. No sure fired growth programme from the local Christian book-shop could be undertaken. Not even a string of prayer meetings to get God into action could happen. Dead people can do none of these things. So God told his servant to preach the word to this valley of bones. As he did a rattling started. Bones rattled out of the engulfing dust and sought the right place to be. As he spoke sinews and muscle, flesh and skin appeared until a fully fleshed nation lay on the desert floor. But they were still not what and where God wanted them to be, they were just bodies lying in the sand. God said to Ezekiel (who must have been stunned by what his preaching had done!), 'Prophecy again to the Spirit.' As he did the bodies began to move, arms stretched and toes wiggled as spirit came back. Then as they stood altogether Ezekiel saw a mighty army of people. Not just living and breathing but focused for the battle of the ages, taking the life they now shared, by the grace of God, to the nations.

### **Pentecost, the army and us**

What then does it mean for us? According to Jesus, The Father's promise was fulfilled at Pentecost. His Spirit was poured out upon all flesh. The dry extremes of our sin only came to clear view on the cross. We hear the unbelievable when the Son of God, that well watered garden, that human being from whose belly flowed rivers of living water, cried out, "I thirst!" This was because the universal summation of all the desertification that had happened in the heart of every man descended on his.

Apart from comprehending the nature of the Spirit's healing brought to the heart of man we never begin to comprehend the terrible state into which we have fallen.

But Father intervened. As the mighty army has gone out from the Father's counsel with the Gospel, they speak and the Spirit breathes upon us. Bones rattle and join; skin and flesh return. Then our heart and spirit revive by the word of Christ and we stand. Our first cry with our new heart and well watered spirit is "Father! Dear Father! Truly reconciled the joy of his counsel bears fruit and we too become part of his mighty army. Empowered to love under the King of love and be peacemakers under the Prince of peace.

