

4. THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

OUR DESPERATE NEED FOR DAYS LIKE THESE

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In our first three lessons in this series *Charismatic Questions Answered*, we have studied the specific subject, *Does the Gospel of the Kingdom Include Healing for Today?* Our unequivocal conclusion has been that, yes Indeed, various kinds of physical, mental and spiritual healings and deliverances from darkness and demonic powers, were part-and-parcel of Christ's Gospel preaching and included in his on-going commission for the Church for all generations until he returns. **Divine healing is part of the kingdom of God that we are to proclaim, practice, and expect.**

We are now going to ask a logical follow-up question: *HOW* did our Lord perform his mighty works of healing? From whence did his power for such arresting and attesting signs and wonders come? This enquiry will lead us inevitably to Pentecost and the matter of the fullness of the holy Spirit.

JESUS HIMSELF DID NO WORK FOR GOD HIS FATHER UNTIL HE WAS BAPTISED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

Up to the age of **about thirty** when he was baptised (*Lk. 3:23*), Jesus had lived a pure and obedient life in his domestic situation. He was conscious of his special calling, for even at age twelve he craved to be **about his Father's affairs** (*Lk. 2: 49*). Sure, he had demonstrated unusual knowledge and perception as a boy, and he definitely loved the Scriptures, being able to amaze the teachers at the Temple. *But* he had done no mighty works, nor had he begun his Gospel mission until the Spirit of God fell upon him at his baptism. ¹

As he stepped into the Jordan River, John the Baptist demurred, even trying to **prevent him**, saying, **"But I need to be baptised by you!"** Jesus replied, **"Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness"** (*Matt. 3: 13-15*).

What was Jesus getting at? There are many parts to the answer, but we know Jesus was presenting himself to God for His mission, which ultimately was to be secured by his sacrificial death, burial and resurrection. Jesus was declaring, **"See, Father, I have come to do your will, O God"** (*Heb. 10: 7*). In a real sense, Jesus was dying to everything else but His Father's will for him as the Messiah. There in the river Jesus was taking up his cross. This was how the righteousness of God was to be fulfilled by Jesus for us.

The Father was obviously delighted! The voice from heaven owned Jesus as His beloved Son, **"with whom I am well pleased"**. And, **the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon him** (*Matt. 3: 16*).

Why the dove symbolism? Go back to the first reference to a dove in the OT. Remember how after the old world was drowned and as the waters were receding, that Noah released a dove from the ark and she came back bearing an olive branch? This was the sign to Noah that there was dry land --- a new world emerging out there. Are we not meant to make the connection that when Jesus came up out of the water, that God was portraying in graphic symbolism how Jesus His chosen Son would be the Anointed one, the Messiah, God's agent to bring in God's new-creation world? The Spirit would empower Jesus to achieve this.

¹ Later Gnostic writers attributed boyhood miracles to Jesus, such as how he fashioned clay birds, breathed life into them, and let them fly away, but the NT writers know of no such subsequent fanciful embellishments.

Having just been baptised, we are immediately informed that Jesus, full of the holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil (Lk. 4: 1). Mark uses a much stronger and much more graphic word, telling us that the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness (Mk. 1: 12).² (Sometimes the man or woman who is filled with the holy Spirit will be impelled towards trouble and danger, but we may face Satan and his schemes in the full power of the Spirit as Jesus did!)

JESUS WAS A MAN FILLED WITH THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

After his wilderness ordeal, we read that Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee. (Lk. 4: 14). There in his hometown he preached his first sermon in the synagogue. He quoted Isaiah 61;

The Spirit of the LORD God is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and freedom to the prisoners ... (v. 1). Here is as clear an admission as possible from the lips of Jesus that his mighty works were to be done as a man in the anointing power of God's Spirit.

This powerful sermon got Jesus into a lot of hot water when he said, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears (Lk. 4: 16f)! The thing to note is that Jesus understood he was anointed with the power and fullness of the Spirit for his life's work.

Later the apostle Peter was to sum up Jesus' successful ministry by saying how ...

God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him (Acts 10: 38).

Jesus did all his ministry, all his preaching, all his healing, all his miracles, all his work for the kingdom of God in the power of God's holy Spirit. Even committed trinitarian theologians who believe Jesus was "fully God" acknowledge that,

Of all the wonderful works that Jesus did, He did not a one of them in His power as deity ... These works were all done as a Spirit-filled man! They were done in the power of ... the Holy Spirit, such as other men can have ... The power that He exercised was the same power that other men may have, the power of the holy Spirit.³

Although devoutly trinitarian in theology, this writer goes on to say that those who use Jesus' miracles as proof of his alleged Deity ... are mistaken. If miracles would prove that Jesus was ... is God incarnate, then miracles would prove that Elijah and Paul and Peter and Stephen were likewise God incarnate, for they, too, worked miracles!⁴ Well and truly said!

John tells us that God sent Jesus to speak the words of God, and that God gave him the Spirit without measure (John 3: 34). In every aspect of his ministry Jesus was carried along in the power of the Spirit of God. His exorcisms were carried out by the finger of God (Lk. 11:20), which is described in Matthew's parallel passage as being by the Spirit of God (Matt. 12:28). This of course, was prophesied in the OT;

"Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations ..." (Is. 42: 1).

² *Ekbollo* is the same word used when Jesus "cast out" demons.

³ John R. Rice, *The Power of Pentecost Or The Fullness of the Spirit*. SLP, Murfreesboro, TN. 1976, p 54

⁴ *Ibid.* p66

JESUS OFFERED HIMSELF ON THE CROSS BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Do you realise the Bible says Jesus could not have faced the gruesome ordeal of the cross unless the same Spirit of God had been upon him? He unflinchingly offered himself **without spot to God through the eternal Spirit (Hebrews 9:14)**.

JESUS WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD BY THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD

Were it not for the Spirit of God bringing Jesus up from the grave, he would have rotted in the tomb with no hope;

But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Messiah Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit that indwells you (Rom. 8: 11).

IN THE FUTURE MILLENNIAL KINGDOM JESUS WILL REIGN IN THE POWER OF GOD'S SPIRIT.

Then, it is prophesied that when Jesus returns to planet earth to fully usher in God's kingdom, that he will still need the anointing power of the Spirit of his God;

Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit. And the Spirit of the LORD will rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD ... and he will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked ... (Is. 11: 1-5).

Christ will reign upon the renewed earth under the powerful anointing of the Spirit of God. In the glorious Millennial reign Jesus will still be God's uniquely Anointed man. He is forever God's "right hand man"! ⁵

Let us repeat it. Jesus never preached a sermon, never healed a soul, never worked a miracle, never performed any sign, never went to the cross, could never have been raised up to immortality, until and unless he had been filled with the holy Spirit and clothed with power from on high.

I like the way **Bill Johnson** explains the secret of Jesus' power for ministry, even though it makes me squirm and feel rather uncomfortable;

Jesus could not heal the sick. Neither could He deliver the tormented from demons or raise the dead. To believe otherwise is to ignore what He said about Himself ... "The Son can do nothing" (**John 5: 19**). In the Greek language that word *nothing* has a unique meaning --- it means NOTHING, just like it does in English! He had NO supernatural capabilities whatsoever! ...

Jesus became the model for all who would embrace the invitation to invade the impossible in His name. He performed *miracles, wonders, and signs*, as a man in right relationship to God ... not as God. If He performed miracles because He was God, then they would be unattainable for us. But if He did them as a man, I am responsible to pursue His lifestyle. Recapturing this simple truth changes everything and makes possible a full restoration of the ministry of Jesus in His Church. ⁶

Yes, it was the anointing with the full power of the Spirit of God upon Jesus from his baptism onwards that changed everything. Jesus laid down the pattern for his followers for all time. The same anointing power

⁵ E.G. Micah 5: 4-5; Ps. 80: 17; 89: 21.

⁶ Bill Johnson, *When Heaven Invades Earth; A Practical Guide to a Life of Miracles* (Book One), Destiny Image Publishers, PA, 2003, p29. (All emphases original) [Bill Johnson believes that Jesus is God but lived within "self-imposed restriction ... as a man".]

of the holy Spirit upon Jesus is available, indeed essential, for us to carry on his work, as we shall shortly see.

AFTER HIS RESURRECTION JESUS STILL DID NOTHING EXCEPT BY THE HOLY SPIRIT'S ENABLING!

Do you not find it instructive to observe that, just before our Lord was taken up into heaven, Jesus **by the holy Spirit gave orders to the apostles whom he had chosen (Acts 1: 2)?** Don't you find this a strange fact? The resurrected Son of God still needed the power of the Spirit of God to continue his ministry! Well, it's not so strange if we understand that Jesus was a man who never did anything apart from God's anointing power and leading. So ...

The Book of Acts informs us Jesus had only finished the first phase of his mission before his ascension; Luke writes that his Gospel was only ...

The first account I composed ... about all that Jesus began to do and teach ... (Acts 1: 1).

Acts continues the story of Jesus' ministry through his apostles and first followers. Jesus orders them to stay in Jerusalem until the promised power of the holy Spirit falls upon them (v. 4). His power, his anointing is to fall upon them soon, so they may continue to do his works.

JESUS, FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT, IS THE PATTERN FOR ALL SUBSEQUENT CHRISTIAN LIVING

If Jesus, the Son of God, needed to be filled with the holy Spirit, before he could preach a sermon, teach a parable, heal the sick, cast out demons --- *even after his resurrection!* --- how much more urgently did his disciples. God's kingdom work cannot be done in the energy of human flesh and ingenuity. Supernatural work must be done with supernatural power! **"It's not by [human] might, nor by [fleshly] power, but by My Spirit, says the LORD of hosts" (Zech. 4: 6).** Heaven's work needs heaven's power.

JESUS "BREATHED ON" THE DISCIPLES IN ANTICIPATION OF THE PENTECOSTAL OUTPOURING OF THE SPIRIT

Jesus knew how desperately his disciples needed the mighty power of God's Spirit to baptise (fill) them before they went out to carry on his kingdom-work in the world. When he appeared to those hiding and paralysed-from-fear disciples behind locked doors, the Lord Jesus **came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you."** He gave his peace to them at least twice on this occasion (John 20: 19,21).

And when he had said this, he showed them both his hands and his side. The disciples therefore rejoiced when they saw the Lord (v. 20).

Jesus therefore said to them again, " ... As the Father has sent me, I also send you" (v. 21).

Wouldn't you think that, since they have now seen the risen Lord with their own eyes, heard with their own ears his salutations of peace, seen his nail-pierced hands and the spear-scarred side, that since they are now eyewitnesses of his resurrection, and since they have just been told they are being sent out as the Father had sent Jesus, that they would now be ready to immediately go out and start their preaching?

No way! There is something *still missing* --- the mighty outpouring of the Spirit upon them. The next thing we read is that Jesus **breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the holy Spirit" ... (John 20: 19-22).**

The commentators sure have a difficult time making sense of what Jesus did here. Literally, Jesus **blew into** them.⁷ So, what's this all about? Some have suggested this was the moment the disciples were "born again" but this cannot be. The disciples had already believed Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. They had **received** him as their Lord, so had been given the **authority to be the children of God** proving

⁷ *Emphusao* ... blow into, inflate.

they were **born of God** according to **John 1: 12-13**. Jesus had already declared them **clean (John 13: 10)**. Jesus had already promised them seats of authority in his future Messianic Kingdom (**Matt. 19: 28**). The disciples certainly were already “regenerate” members of the kingdom community.

In what sense then does Jesus command them to **receive the holy Spirit** if they were already “born again”? No observable thing happens! And that’s because nothing did happen at this time. Whenever the Spirit of God came upon people in the OT there was action! In the OT “the Spirit of God” is always God’s operational presence and power in the world. Whenever the wind blows, no matter how gently, there will be movement.

So, if they did not receive the holy Spirit when Jesus breathed on them, what’s going on here? The solution is found when we remember that the Spirit was *not yet poured out in demonstrable power* because Jesus had not yet ascended to his glory at the right hand of his heavenly Father (**John 7: 39**). Only the ascended Christ was able to distribute the gifts and the anointing power of the holy Spirit.⁸ Jesus was delegating his *authority* to the disciples, but not yet his *power* to them.

Once again we are confronted with the need to understand that the Bible is a Jewish book. By blowing upon the disciples Jesus is giving a prophetic pre-enactment. He has already done this kind of thing before.

Recall the Last Supper: Jesus had but a few days earlier shared “communion” with the disciples. Jesus had anticipated a future reality by a present symbolic act; **“This bread is my body ... This cup is my blood shed for you”** he told them. When they ate and drank those elements, the disciples participated in a future reality --- the death and resurrection of the Saviour. The Last Supper was a prophetic rehearsal of Jesus’ still future death. (The theologians can’t simply leave it that simple, so they call this kind of enacted future “prolepsis”!)

Jesus blowing upon the disciples and commanding them to receive the holy Spirit was the kind of prophetic acting out of something in God’s promised future. It’s a very common feature in Scripture, actually.⁹

The thing still missing before they could start their evangelistic work was “the baptism of the holy Spirit”, the fulness of the outpoured Spirit of God, what the old-timers called the enduement of power, the being clothed upon, the being drenched in the Spirit of God. For this event the disciples must wait a little longer till the day of Pentecost.

PENTECOST WAS FOR POWER TO PREACH THE GOSPEL

Now look at these Scriptures that tell us why the disciples had to wait in Jerusalem before they were to preach the Gospel to the nations;

You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high (Lk. 24: 47-49).

But you will receive power when the holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1: 8).

And they were all filled with the holy Spirit, and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability ... and that day about three thousand souls were added (Acts 2: 4, 41).

When he ascended into heaven Jesus, as it were, passed the baton onto his followers. It’s clear they could not fulfill the momentous task of the Great Commission in their own human strength and wisdom. No

⁸ For a full discussion of this topic see my two articles [Christ’s Ascent and Descent in Ephesians 4: 7-11](#).

⁹ An OT example is Ezekiel in **Ez. 4** and a NT example is Agabus in **Acts 21:10-11**.

evangelism must begin until they were baptised with the power of the holy Spirit. Just like Jesus, they must be clothed with power from on high, they must be filled with the power of the Spirit for God's work. For this they had to wait.

And that dear reader, is where we will wait until our next instalment!