

Sunday 9th May 2021

Acts 10: 44-48 & John 15:9-17

I remember walking into the big tent at a Christian Youth Conference called Soul Survivor with half a dozen young people from my old church. There was one lad who had only just started coming to the youth group. He'd hardly ever been to a church service let alone a huge gathering like there was that night. But I had tried to reassure him that he was among friends and all would be well. I was hoping the first night wouldn't be too weird for him. Hoping that he would experience a gentle introduction to church. All was going well, the music was great; the chit chat and banter on the stage was fun...and then....people started to be filled with the Holy Spirit...there were people speaking in tongues, people singing in tongues, there were prophecies, people were falling to the floor, some laughing some sobbing. I anxiously looked round at the lad to see if he was okay with all this, and he just looked completely poker faced – I couldn't read him at all. I must admit I was feeling a bit embarrassed – what was I thinking, encouraging him to come to an event like this?

After the service, on the way back to the camp site we chatted, and I asked him how he found it and what he said, has stayed with me to this day.

He said, you talked about a God who loves us; a God who could even love me. You talked about a God who is alive and active and makes a difference in people's lives and could even make a difference in my life. And as you know, I wasn't sure. He had certainly been dealt a rubbish hand in life. But, he went on to say, what I saw tonight was beyond anything I've ever experienced. I've been to music concerts but something very different was going on here. God is real, isn't he?

My anxiety that he needed a gentle introduction to church was blown away. I'd assumed that a sanitized, risk-free church service would win him for Christ – how wrong I was. He needed to see God in action in order to believe that the Gospel was genuine.

We all need reminding that the God we worship is outside our understanding. He's way bigger than we can ever imagine, and the Kingdom of the God is different. It is spiritual. It is supernatural and cannot be contained or controlled however hard we try.

This lad went on to be filled with the Holy Spirit at a later meeting and subsequently spent several years working for the church. Life was still hard. But he was transformed. He was visibly different.

Luke, the writer of the book of Acts continuously reminds us that being filled with the Holy Spirit is never invisible.

In chapter 2 where Luke describes Pentecost, the Spirit enables believers to speak in foreign languages and love one another with his supernatural love.

In chapter 4 the Spirit makes them bold, and in chapter 5 the Spirit empowers them to heal.

In chapter 8 a leading magician tries to purchase the gift of the Holy Spirit, because what he sees is far better than any of his magic shows.

In chapter 10 the Holy Spirit enables Cornelius and friends to speak in tongues and praise God with the same uninhibited joy as the 120 at Pentecost.

Chapter 11 :15-17 Peter was able to see visibly that the Holy Spirit came on them in the same way that he had on the day of Pentecost.

In chapter 19 Paul expects the Ephesians to know if they have received the Holy Spirit or not, and when he lays his hands on them, they speak in tongues and prophesy.

Taken in isolation, any one of these might be dismissed as exceptional, but taken together Luke's message is very clear, very clear indeed.

Romans 15:4 says since "everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope".

These passages in Acts remind us that being filled with the Spirit should make us visibly different.

There seem to be two main areas that hold us back both individually and as a church from seeing and believing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Firstly, It is all too easy to side-line Luke's teaching.

Maybe for you – you haven't had such a dramatic experience. And so argue, it can't truly be all that important because I haven't seen it or experienced it.

By concentrating on Bible study, prayer, and the nuts and bolts of church life, all of which are really important, we can inadvertently treat, being filled with the Spirit, as if it were an add-on to the Gospel instead of the Gospel itself.

Let us not forget the reason Jesus came to earth,

John the Baptist said, as recorded in Matthew 3:11 'I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Jesus came to baptize us with the Holy Spirit.

Let's not forget why Jesus went back to heaven

John 14: 25-26 All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

Jesus returned to heaven in order to send the Holy Spirit to all who believe in Him.

Let's not forget one of the main reasons that he saved us.

It is recorded in Galatians 3:14 ¹⁴ He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

Jesus redeemed us so that we may receive the Spirit. We aren't just saved so we have a place in heaven when we die – we are saved so that we might receive the Holy Spirit.

Peter held such a high view of being filled with the Holy Spirit that he actually called it "participating in the divine nature" 2 Peter 1:4 The Passion translation says 'he has given you magnificent promises that are beyond all price, so that through the power of these tremendous promises we can experience partnership with the divine nature.

This is one of the great mysteries of our faith, that God shares his nature with us. We are given birth by the Holy Spirit to be God's true sons and daughters.

I encourage you to look back at the first time you said yes to Jesus? Maybe it wasn't a dramatic one-off experience but a series of events and people encouraging you. Maybe you look back and think that you have always been a Christian. Your parents were Christian, and you haven't known anything different. You know Jesus is real, you know Jesus is alive and active. And that is awesome. You have been filled with the Holy Spirit – you are as Paul says, participating with the divine. Just because it wasn't a dramatic even, doesn't mean you haven't got the Holy Spirit living in you. All Christians, all who have committed their lives to Christ have His precious Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is not an add on to the Gospel it is very much part of it.

The second area that can hold us and the church back is that sometimes we place too much emphasis on our first filling with the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes we can think that once we believe, that's it, we're saved, that we can rest back and neglect the clear teaching that we need to go on being filled, every day. Luke deliberately downplays the distinction between initial and subsequent infillings of the Holy Spirit because he wants us to focus on the question "am I full?" instead of on the question "was I filled?" You see the first filling is simply a prelude to more of the same.

I wonder if we get confused by the word baptism, baptism by the Spirit. The Church's teaching says we only need one Baptism – we only need to be baptised once into the body of Christ. And that may be true, but Spiritual filling is different.

Jesus longs for us to be full of the Holy Spirit.

John 20 – resurrection day, as the disciples were hidden away in a locked room – Jesus stood among them and breathed on them and said receive the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:4 At Pentecost 'All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.'

Acts 4:8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them:

Acts 4:31 After Peter & John were released after being arrested, they went to see the other believers and it says, 'After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.'

Not once but time after time.

Luke uses exactly the same verb in all of these verses. Peter was initially filled, subsequently filled, and then filled yet again with the Spirit.

In fact, Luke works very hard in Acts to ensure that none of us reduce being filled with the Spirit to a historical event, but "go on being filled with the Holy Spirit" day by day.

Paul in his letter to the Ephesians says

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. Eph 1:17

And in Ephesians 3:16 he writes - I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,

John 3:34 For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit.

Let us not allow the blessings of the past, quench our thirst for the present and the future.

For those who have seen the movie Crocodile Dundee, 2 you will remember the almost comic scene. The Australian, Mick Dundee, goes to New York with the journalist he met in the outback. He goes out for a walk, in downtown Manhattan, he is attacked by a mugger, who threatens Mick with a small pocket-knife. In response, Dundee draws his own massive bushman's knife and waves it in his assailant's face, saying 'No mate. This is a knife.'

My friends, there's a spiritual battle going on in the world. And Paul says in Ephesians 6 v 10 be strong in the Lord and his mighty power, or as the Passion translation says 'Be supernaturally infused with strength through your life-union with the Lord Jesus. Stand victorious with the force of his explosive power flowing in and through you.

We are called to make sure we don't limit our mindset and reduce our view of being filled with the Spirit to something less than it really is. Luke reminds us that it is not a little pocket-knife. We are called to arm ourselves with a whacking great big, powerful "sword of the Spirit".

Don't settle for less than God offers you. He can do immeasurably more than we can ever think or imagine. It's time to throw off limitation and live daily by the power of the Spirit. Are you ready for that?

A short story as I draw to a close. There's a story of a man who was unwell and his pastor asked him- 'What's on your bucket list?' What would you like to do while you still have time on this earth? The man instantly replied, 'I want to raise a dead person back to life.' He knew the power of the Holy Spirit and he wanted it to surge through his body to Glorify God, strengthen other believers and show that God is real.

As our John reading said – God has chosen you. He has chosen each one of us, so that you may bear fruit, fruit that will last.

God has chosen you. God loves you and he has equipped you to make a difference for His Kingdom. And the gifts given by the Spirit make a visible difference. They are supernatural gifts that we can all receive.

Do you long to be filled with the Spirit? Do you long to make a difference for God's Kingdom? Do you long for the gift of tongues, or discernment, leadership? To expand God's church, we need more people to step forward and say 'Here I am'!

What about the gift of hospitality, administration? Maybe for you, you simply need the gift of faith which will enable you to say I CAN do all things through Christ, who strengthens me.

So, whether you are in the building or watching at home. May I encourage you right now, to reach out your hands, palms up, expectant to receive a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit today.

Let us pray.

Come Holy Spirit
Fill us afresh today.