

Series: “The Holy Spirit”
Introduction

Before the Risen Christ ascended back to heaven, He said this to His disciples: “I am going to send you what my Father has promised, but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). What was it the Father had promised? *The Holy Spirit!* Before the disciples began the task of communicating the message about Jesus to the world, they were told to *wait* until God sent *His power* on them.

The gospel writer Luke also wrote the Book of Acts. In chapter 1, the same thing is expressed: “While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. ‘This,’ he said, ‘is what you have heard from me, for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’” (Acts 1:4-5). Wait for the promise of the Father, Jesus said. Wait for the Holy Spirit to come! Then you will be baptized or immersed in Him. In verse 8 of Acts 1 it continues: “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.” When the Spirit comes you will receive power to communicate the message of Christ to others.

The disciples followed Jesus’ instructions. They stayed in Jerusalem, and devoted themselves to prayer. On the Jewish festival day called Pentecost, the *Holy Spirit* was poured down on them, and this small group of ordinary people began to impact the world for Christ. Those in the church became so dynamic and influential that they were referred to as those who “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6).

These Scriptures set the stage for a series of sermons on the Holy Spirit. Who is He? What does He do? Actually, these sermons are really *teaching sermons*. Understanding the work of the Holy Spirit, and experiencing the reality of the Holy Spirit, is essential if the Christian life is to be effective. I pray that what I say today and in the next few weeks will stir up a yearning for the presence and power of the Spirit of God in each of us. So without any further introductory remarks, let’s get going!

I think a sensible place to start is simply to ask: ***Who or what is the Holy Spirit?*** The Holy Spirit is the least known Person of the Trinity. We talk of the Heavenly Father, yes. The Son, Jesus, yes. But who or what is this “spirit” thing? The old English word sometimes used is “ghost” – Holy Ghost. That sounds rather spooky!

The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Trinity: God the Father, the Son and the Spirit. I suppose one of the worst ways to start a sermon series is by talking about the Holy Trinity! No one can fully understand or explain the Trinity. We can’t fathom that God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are separate, and equal – yet only *one God*.

Part of the problem is that the ancient Hebrews looked on personality differently than we do. We think of persons as separate and distinct personalities. But in the Bible, persons are not separate and distinct, they kind of flow into each other. For instance, a man sort of lives on in his sons. A father’s godliness kind of overflows and extends to his family. So, to Hebrews, God

as Father, Son and Spirit sort of spill over into each other. The Hebrews didn't struggle with a weird celestial math that says 1 plus 1 plus 1 = 1!

The important thing to understand is that the Holy Spirit is God. He has always existed because God has always existed. He has no beginning, no end. Hebrews 9:14 refers to the "eternal Spirit". Genesis 1:2 says the Spirit of God was present at creation – the Spirit of God was "hovering over the waters". So, when we come into contact with the Holy Spirit we are experiencing *God – God moving, God in action!*

It's also important to understand that the Holy Spirit is a "Person". We sing that classic hymn, "Holy, Holy, Holy, God in three persons, blessed Trinity." No, He is not a *physical* person as you and me. The Holy Spirit will not show up here in slacks and a blazer and engage us in conversation. He is "spirit" just as God is a *spiritual Being*.

Yet as a Person, the Holy Spirit has a personality. He can think, feel, will, reason. For instance, in Romans 8:27, it says the Holy Spirit has a *mind* and *intercedes* for believers. He possesses a *will*. 1 Corinthians 12:11 says He apportions His gifts as He wills. Romans 15:30 says the Holy Spirit possesses *love*. He can be *grieved* - Ephesians 4:30. He can be *lied to* - Acts 5:39. He can be *insulted* or *outraged* – Hebrews 10:29. So, let's not refer to the Holy Spirit as an "it" or as some impersonal force. He is a Divine Person, the third Person of the Trinity. God in action!

I said at the beginning of this message that the followers of Jesus were told to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit to come. God had promised to send them the power of the Spirit. On the day of Pentecost that Holy Spirit came!

Pentecost marked the beginning of a new age as far as the Spirit's work in the world. Let's take a moment to see how the Holy Spirit worked prior to Pentecost, in the period of the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, the Spirit would come on some of Israel's heroes and leaders and enable them to do spectacular feats. He comes on *Samson*, and Samson tears a lion apart bare-handed. He empowers the judges to lead God's people in battle for the Lord – judges like Othniel, Gideon, Deborah. Again and again it says the Spirit of the Lord came on them. The Spirit comes on *Saul* and *David*, and anoints them for their work as king.

In the Old Testament, the Spirit of God comes on people and they *prophecy*. For instance, in the time of Samuel and Saul there were roving bands of prophets who were possessed by the Spirit of God. The prophet Micah wrote: "But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord" (Micah 3:8). By the time of Jesus (still before Pentecost), it's still only a few who are full of God's Spirit: John the Baptist, Zechariah and Elizabeth (his parents), and Mary (the mother of Jesus). *Prior to Pentecost, it seems that the Holy Spirit just comes on a select few. He comes and goes. He stays long enough for these individuals to do a specific task for God.*

But gradually, a longing, a prophetic vision emerges in the Old Testament, that God would pour out His Spirit on all, not just a few, and He would put His Spirit *within* people. The prophet

Ezekiel expresses this. God says to Israel: “I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances” (Ezekiel 36:24-27).

It was the prophet Joel who was moved to speak words that most accurately portrayed what happened on the day of Pentecost. “Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days I will pour out my spirit” (Joel 2:28-29). Peter, in his sermon at Pentecost, quotes this prophecy, and says it is being fulfilled!

Pentecost was the beginning of a new age in which God has made His Spirit available to everyone. (This, by the way, is a sign that the “last days” are here!) All who believe in Jesus and follow Him receive the Spirit.

Also, the Spirit will not come, stay awhile, then leave. He will permanently dwell within the followers of Jesus! Jesus, soon before His arrest and trial and crucifixion, said this would happen! “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you” (John 14:16-17). Notice, Jesus says the Father will give them *another* Advocate/Helper. (We will look at this in a future sermon). He will be with them *forever*, and *remain with them*. He would not just dwell *with* them, but be *in* them.

Here’s the good news: You and I are living in the age of the Spirit, when the Holy Spirit is available to all humanity. He comes to all those who turn from sin and put their faith in Christ. Peter made this clear in his sermon on the day of Pentecost. A huge crowd heard him preach, and were convicted by his preaching. They asked, “What shall we do?” Peter responded: “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and *you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*” (Acts 2:38). “Repent” – that means to turn around, to change. Be baptized – this would symbolize trusting Christ, beginning the Christian life. If you do this, God has gift for you! The Holy Spirit.

OK, this is all some basic teaching. But in the end, the Holy Spirit is not a doctrine to hold, a topic for discussion, but a real life Divine Person to be encountered and experienced! The Holy Spirit is the presence and activity of God living in us! The Spirit and presence of Jesus!

I love the description Jesus gave when He referred to the Spirit as “rivers of living water”. “On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, ‘If any one thirst, let

him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, “Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.” Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:37-39). Jesus said this during the Feast of Tabernacles. Part of the ceremony was that the priest would go down to the Pool of Siloam, fill a golden pitcher with water, then take it back to temple and pour it out on the altar. This was a way of thanking God for the gift of water, and remembering how God provided water from the rock in the wilderness wanderings.

For 7 days of the feast, the priest would go down, and get water in the golden pitcher. But on the *last day*, the 8th day, the priest would not get water, for now they were celebrating Israel’s entrance into the promised land with its springs and water courses. John writes that it was on that *last day* of the feast that Jesus stood up and said, if anyone is thirsty, come to me and drink. We can have *rivers of living water gushing out from inside us*. Jesus is talking about having the abundance of the Spirit in us!

We can have that Spirit in abundance! God’s own presence, Jesus Himself, through the Spirit, inside us and flowing out of us! To quench our deepest longings. To purify and revitalize us. To impact others and the world around us for Christ!

In the next few weeks we will be looking at the work of the Holy Spirit: His power to awaken us to new life, how He can lead us, the Spirit as our Helper and Advocate, the fruit of the Spirit and how He can enable us to make a difference, and then the gifts of the Holy Spirit, given to every believer.

Maybe the Spirit of God is already creating a desire in you not only to *learn more* about Him, but to *possess more* of His presence and power. His fullness is available for you – and me – and this church.

Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost tells us how to receive the Spirit: repent, turn from our sins and turn to God. Be willing to part with those things that keep us from God. And, be baptized. This means not just physical baptism, but baptism as a sign that we are beginning life as a disciple of Jesus. We’re trusting Christ to forgive us and give us a new direction for our life.

God has promised that if we do these things, we will receive the Holy Spirit as a gift. Wait for Him expectantly. Allow Him to begin to fill your life and energize you with the very presence and power of God Himself living in you!

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