

Our Greatest Need, Part 5

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his is now "part 5" of our series on "Our Greatest Need," which is to be filled with the Holy Spirit. We looked at several instances from the Old Testament in which the role of the Holy Spirit is highlighted. We saw that the Holy Spirit was active at creation, hovering or "fluttering" over the face of the waters, a picture which is still accurate today! We saw that the Holy Spirit was involved in the creation of Adam, when God said, "Let Us make man in Our image," an objective which has never changed. We saw that the Holy Spirit is God's gift of conscience, the buffer or "enmity" which restricts Satan's influence and has given this world the opportunity to have a semblance of life even in its condition of sin. At the end of time, the Lord will remove the influences of His sweet Spirit, the "control rods" which have prevented the chain reaction of sin from exploding, and the universe will see the more complete demonstration of the effects of sin.

We saw that the Holy Spirit can be grieved away, as Genesis 6 reports concerning the days prior to the the Flood. We saw the Spirit manifested in giving gifts and talents for the building of the sanctuary and during empowering men like Gideon, Jephthah and Samson to battle against the enemy. The Spirit was active during the days of the kings and after the return from the captivity. Indeed, the Spirit was active all throughout all the Old Testament period, because it was He Who inspired the prophets with the messages which they bore.

Last time we took a brief look at the role of the Holy Spirit during the life of Jesus. We saw that it was by the Spirit that Mary miraculously conceived and gave birth to the Savior and that Christ's birth is a model of the Christian's rebirth. We saw that the Spirit was active at Christ's baptism and prepared Him for His work of ministry, as He was anointed and "went about doing good." This is the template for every Christian, to be anointed by the Spirit and become, to a lesser degree "a messiah" (that's with a lower case "a" and "m") and "go about doing good." Christ's final instructions, given on Thursday night before His arrest, were full of information on the role the Holy Spirit would play in the development of the church of the New Testament.

Today we're going to look at the role of the Holy Spirit in the formation of the "body of Christ," the church. We'll see that it was the Spirit Who gave the body life and it was the Spirit who gave the body direction, power and wisdom. The Church established by Jesus would be built on the model of Adam's creation, an illustration we noted a few weeks ago. Adam was composed of a physical component, the "dust of the ground," but it wasn't until God knelt and breathed into him the breath of life that he became "a living being." We see this as a model, or type, of two very important things. This we saw was an illustration of the Scriptures, the written Word which became a living Book when inspired, or "breathed into" by God's Spirit. And secondly, this also is an illustration of the

New Testament Church. Genesis 2:7, which says that God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into him the breath of life, therefore becomes a picture of the formation of both the Bible and the Church.

Like Adam, the New Testament Church was composed of a "physical element," the human beings who just days before were squabbling over "who would be the greatest." These were the same disciples who frowned at the gift of love bestowed by Mary Magdalene just days before Jesus' death. But they *really weren't* the "same" disciples as they were a few weeks before, were they. They had been converted (except for the traitor Judas). They were changed. They were different because the Holy Spirit had come into their lives and with heartfelt humility they had confessed their petty differences and put aside their personal agendas. Now they were prepared to be empowered by the Spirit and become the "living body" of the Church, just as was Adam, when he received the breath of God and became a living being.

Jesus had graphically alluded to this "coming to life" experience just before His death. After His death on the cross and resurrection, Christ had anticipated the revival of the disciples on the day of Pentecost. Jesus met with them that Sunday evening after His resurrection. While we read this passage in John, let your mind go back to Genesis 2:7, which describes how God breathed into Adam the breath of life and he became a living being. See a connection between the creation of Adam and the creation of the Church, which the Bible describes as the "body of Christ." "He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Then Jesus said to them again, 'Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.' And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" John 20:20-22.

He "breathed on them" and said "Receive the Holy Spirit." Do you catch the significance of this picture? The disciples, the "body" of Christ, had been formed, just as Adam had been "formed." But they were as yet without the "life" which would turn them into the force that would change the world. What does the Apostle James say? "The body without the spirit is dead." James 2:26. The "body" of the church was there, but it wasn't the "living being" that it would become later. Jesus then "breathed on them," that is, the body of believers, in an act that reflected what happened back in Eden when God breathed into the body of Adam the breath of life. It would be a number of weeks before this new life would take hold of the "body" and transform it into the Church that would "turn the world upside down." How does the Bible describe the coming of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost? It was with the sound of a "mighty rushing wind," representing the Spirit of God that the "body" came to life. If you think about it, this very event was prophesied hundreds of years ago through the prophet Ezekiel. Do you remember what he saw? He was given a vision in which he witnessed dry bones which came to life by God's Spirit and became a mighty army. Ezekiel 37. The world had to wait about 6 centuries before that vision became reality, but it did

on the Day of Pentecost.

So there is a connection between Genesis 2 and the New Testament Church. We saw also that there is a connection between Exodus 31 and the New Testament Church. Immediately, Acts 2 reports, the Spirit empowered the body with miraculous gifts for the purpose of building the "tabernacle," the New Testament church, just as He had gifted Bezaleel and Aholiab 15 centuries before. Remember that it was because Bezaleel and Aholiab were filled with the Spirit of God that they were enabled to do their work of building the tabernacle. That's similar, if your eyes are open to spiritual understanding, to what happened in Acts 2.

Right away, the disciples were empowered with the ability to speak in other languages to the people at Jerusalem, who were gathered from every country. Remember that Pentecost was one of the 3 major festivals which all males were required to attend. Thus in Jerusalem at that time there were Jews from many different countries. Most of them had grown up not knowing the Aramaic language, but spoke languages indigenous to the countries of their birth. Think of what a wonderful opportunity there would be to share the news of the resurrected Christ, if only these visitors could hear the Gospel in their own language! Then they could disperse the Good News as they returned to their homes.

How was God going to "bridge" this language chasm? What did He tell Moses when He sent him on a mission of redemption? Moses offered up the excuse that he was no longer familiar with the language, and God said, "Who has made man's mouth?" Exodus 4:11. Was that an insurmountable problem for the Creator God? Absolutely not! Was a language deficiency going to hinder the work of salvation back in Egypt? No! And on the Day of Pentecost He gifted the disciples with the unusual ability to speak in languages they didn't know before. Take careful note that these were *real languages* which they spoke, not gibberish. The modern day "speaking in tongues" bears little resemblance to what happened in Acts 2.

So we see the connection between Acts 2 and Exodus 31. Remember that Bezaleel and Aholiab were to be "filled with the Spirit" so they could do what? So they could build the tabernacle. In a similar way the disciples were first century "Bezaleels," being given Spirit-endowed ability to build the "tabernacle of the Lord," that is, preach the Gospel so that the church would grow. In fact, the Apostle James, when reviewing at the council held in Jerusalem in A.D. 49, the miraculous gifts given to Jewish and Gentile believers, declared that this was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Amos in which he had said, "After this I will return and will *rebuild the tabernacle* of David which has fallen down. I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up, so that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD." Acts 15:16. Peter and John and the rest of the apostles were first century "Bezaleels," being filled with the Spirit to build the tabernacle.

Today many Christians are looking for a physical application of the promise to "rebuild the tabernacle." What would the Apostle James say about that way of understanding the prophecy? Should we look to a physical building of the temple in Jerusalem to be the way that prophecy is fulfilled? "No," he would tell us. The "rebuilding of the tabernacle" takes place when the Gospel is preached and people accept Jesus as Messiah and the Church grows. That's what James understood this prophecy to mean. And that's exactly what was happening in the early church. Satan has clouded many minds to misunderstand the Scriptures today. When you listen to the radio or read popular Christian literature, it's filled with talk about the building of a temple in Jerusalem being a necessary requirement for prophecy to be fulfilled. Not so!

In the early Church, the Spirit was in total control. From this point forward, it would be the Spirit Who would direct the movements of the Church in its outreach. We find a transition in the first chapter of Acts that makes this clear. When Judas forfeited his apostleship, the disciples in Acts 1 felt it important to have a replacement for his position, so they followed the practice that had been in place for many centuries; they "cast lots." What was this "casting of lots" all about? This was a simple method of making a decision, often having a bag with all white stones and one black stone, or vice versa. Reaching into the bag, the one who grasped the stone of the different color was the "chosen one." It would be similar to the technique we've used in "drawing straws," in which one straw is shorter than the others.

This system of casting lots had been in place throughout Old Testament times, and had received the blessing of God. It's referred to over 20 times in the Old Testament. It was the method by which the Lord's goat was chosen on the Day of Atonement. It was the technique used in dividing up Canaan into different territories for the tribes of Israel. It was the way priestly duties were assigned, before and after the captivity. Although not specifically identified, no doubt it was the way by which the treacherous Achan was discovered. The renegade prophet Jonah was found when the sailors on board the storm-tossed sea cast lots.

In Acts 1, casting lots was the way that Matthias was chosen to be the replacement disciple over the traitor Judas. But this is the *last time* we read in the Bible about "casting lots." It may have been a divinely approved method of making decisions in the past, but it did not represent God's ideal in how to lead His people. The church was now to be directed by God's Spirit, not "drawing straws." The book of Acts is the account of the Church when filled with the Holy Spirit, when "breathed into by the breath of God." Had not Jesus promised, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you"? Acts 1:8. The book of Acts shows what can happen when the "body" is "God-breathed." So it was, as noted, that with the sound of a "mighty rushing wind" the presence of God's Spirit was manifested, along with the flames of fire that appeared on the disciples' heads.

The story of the "body filled with the Spirit" is the record of the Book of Acts. We'll take a quick excursion through its chapters to see this vital principle at work. We'll find that in nearly every chapter there is explicit reference to the Spirit's leading. Thus we read that Peter, "filled with the Holy Spirit," gave his answer to those who questioned by what authority the lame man was healed at the Gate Beautiful. Acts 4:8. Later in this same chapter the apostles prayed for boldness to share the Word. "And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness." Acts 4:31.

In Acts 5 Peter declares the sin of Ananias and Sapphira to be a lie against the Holy Spirit, indicating the close connection the Spirit maintained with the body. Acts 5:3. In Acts 6, the Church sought out those "full of the Holy Spirit" to serve as deacons. Later in the same chapter, one of those deacons, Stephen, proclaimed the word of Christ with power. The opponents of the cross "were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke." Acts 6:10. After his brilliant defense in the next chapter, we read that Stephen, "being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God." Acts 7:55.

In chapter 8, on hearing the work that Phillip was doing in Samaria, Peter and John went there, prayed for the people and laid their hands on them, "and they received the Holy Spirit." Acts 8:17. Later in the chapter, it was the Spirit who encouraged Phillip to catch up with a chariot on its way through the desert road toward Gaza. A certain treasurer, returning from worshiping at Jerusalem, was reading from the scroll of Isaiah. Phillip asked him if he understood what he was reading, and the Ethiopian replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" Acts 8:31.

We'll pause a moment on this story to notice the Spirit-led dynamics of this not-by-coincidence encounter. The Spirit brought Phillip, a deacon of the Church, to the side of the Ethiopian. Think about this principle: God *doesn't usually work independently from the Church He established*. He usually works through the Church. He could spread the Word by the ministry of angels, and sometimes He does, but most often He puts people in touch with His Church, the "body" He brought to life by His Spirit. This is a very important concept to grasp, because many today don't see the value of the "Church." They feel they can be Christians and not attached to the body. But consider these questions: when is an arm most useful? When it is attached or not attached to the body? When is an eye most useful? When it is attached or not attached to the body? Is it God's will that I be "attached to the body"? Yes!

We find in the Spirit-filled, Spirit-led church of the book of Acts that God is constantly working through His church, not independently of the Church. We find in the Book of Acts that the Spirit led the Church, and led others to the Church

and through the Church. Was not Ananias, a church member in Damascus, told to anoint Saul, who became Paul? Was not Cornelius directed to send messengers to Peter to be instructed? So it was in the story of Acts 8. The Spirit led the treasurer to read from the scroll of Isaiah, and caused it to be (notice the timing of this!) that he would be reading what we would call Isaiah 53 at the exact moment that Phillip caught up with him. Of all the chapters in the Old Testament, could you pick one that would be more appropriate from which to "preach Jesus"? That's what the evangelist Phillip did, and that man accepted Jesus as the Christ of prophecy and was baptized by Phillip. This was a divine appointment, arranged and engineered by the Spirit.

These experiences can be ours also! Did it "just happen" that you sat next to someone on the plane, or stood in line at the grocery store next to "that person?" We should always be on the lookout for Spirit-led appointments! We should pray for them! Ask the Spirit to put you in touch with someone who needs to hear about Jesus and His salvation and the special truths for our day! Keep in mind that the book of Acts was never finished. It is an anomaly among the New Testament books in that it doesn't have the word "amen" at the end, like most of the other books. God is still writing the account of the "acts" of the "apostles." It may no longer be Peter, Stephen, Phillip or Paul. Now we are His disciples and apostles. Now we are the "Spirit-filled body" sent to do the work of Christ.

It was the Spirit Who prompted Peter to meet with the messengers of Cornelius after the thrice-repeated vision of the animals in the sheet, and Who then filled the new believers in the household of Cornelius. Acts 10:19, 44. It was the Spirit that challenged the Church to "separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Acts 13:2. These were then sent on a missionary tour through Cyprus and Asia Minor. On their second missionary trip, after the council of Jerusalem reported in Acts 15, it was the Spirit who forbade the apostles from going into Asia, instead going to Troas where Paul received a vision of a man of Macedonia calling for their help. A divine appointment was waiting for Paul and Silas in, of all places, a jail!

The Spirit had detected a heart that could be won to Christ; a man serving as jailor in Philippi. Because of this, the Spirit "forbade" them from going to these other places, at least for the time being. In Philippi were those whose livelihood was impacted by Paul's preaching. It seems that these were men who had made money from the predictions and fortune-telling of a demon possessed girl whom Paul healed. During the uproar that followed, brought about by the false accusations of these slave owners, Paul and Silas were cast into prison. Did they complain and murmur? No! They sang hymns of praise to God! But when the place was shaken by a great earthquake at midnight and the prisoners were released, the warden was about to commit suicide, fearing the escape of those in his keeping. Paul restrained him, assuring him that they were all there and not leaving. Question: Why did the other prisoners obey Paul and not flee? Could it be that they dared not, fearing the God Whom Paul served and praised? Could it be

that they were aware of the miracle of the healing of the demon-possessed girl and heeded Paul's admonition to remain?

The jailor, witnessing all this, fell trembling at Paul's feet and said (notice how the warden addressed his inmate with these words!), "Sirs, what I must do to be saved?' So they said, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.' Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized." Acts 16:30-33. Notice the irony! Notice the two "washings" in that last verse. He washed the ugly stripes of his prisoners, and he and his family were washed from their sins. A Spirit-led divine appointment! Won't it be great to meet that jailor in heaven! You'll ask him, "So you're the one who was the warden in Philippi! What a story he'll have to tell!

Notice that the Spirit forbade them from going into Asia or Bithynia in order to minister to this jailor. It may be that in your life doors will be closed by the Spirit, but know that it will be for a greater purpose. You won't know of it at the time, just as Paul had no idea of the jailor who would give his heart to Jesus, but if we're open to the Spirit's leading, the appointments will take place. What an exciting way to live! We can ask, God, is there someone I can share the water of life with today? Is there someone who needs to hear about Jesus that You can put me in touch with today?

It was the Spirit Who "constrained" or "pressed"(KJV) Paul in Corinth to preach to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ, where he remained 18 months preaching the Word of God. Acts 18:5, 11. It was the Spirit Who continued to direct the rest of the movements of the Church recorded in the book of Acts that we have in our Bibles, and proceeded to direct the movements of His people as recorded in the continuation of the book of Acts being written in heaven.

The Spirit was active in the Old Testament times, hovering or "fluttering" over the face of the waters, bestowing special talents for the building of the church, empowering over the enemy. The Spirit was active in the life of our Lord, making conception possible for the virgin Mary, anointing for the work of ministry, equipping for the battle against the devil. The Spirit brought to life the body of the Church, leading and empowering it to share the Good News of Jesus with the first century world.

The Spirit is waiting for us to open our hearts and come into unity so that He can fill the body with God's breath and cause it to become a living army. The Spirit is there to guide us in decision making. We don't have to draw straw or put rocks in a bag. We can pray and ask for divine guidance. Sometimes we'll find that like the apostles the doors will close and we will be "forbidden" to take a particular course. When that happens, we can be assured that God has another plan in mind for the furtherance of His work. Other times we will find that we will

be “constrained” or “pressed” into action as was Paul in Corinth and filled with boldness as were the apostles, and we will be unable to keep still.

We need the Holy Spirit! We need the Spirit to shape and mold us, and to equip and empower us for the work that must be done to prepare for Jesus' coming. Is that your goal? Your desire? Is that what you want in your life? Something to give life real and lasting meaning? Pray to be filled with His Spirit. Make that prayer the way you open your day. Make that prayer one that often ascends to your Father in heaven, Who is more willing to give of His Spirit than earthly fathers give gifts to their children.