

“Power!”

At the end of Luke’s gospel there is this scene where the Risen Christ appears to the 11 disciples and some others in Jerusalem. One of the things He says to them is: “I am going to send you what my Father promised” (Luke 24:49a). What did the Father promise? It’s the *Holy Spirit*. Jesus would soon return to the Father in heaven, but He would send His Spirit, the Holy Spirit, to be with them, and in them.

Jesus tells them what to do to prepare for the coming of the Holy Spirit: “But stay in the city until you are clothed with *power* from on high” (Luke 24:49b). Notice, “until you are clothed with *power* from on high”. The Greek word for power is δυνάμιν (dunamin) - from which we get the English word dynamite. Over in Acts 1:8, Jesus says, “But you shall receive *power* (δυνάμιν) when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.”

Jesus’ followers did what He told them to do. They stayed in Jerusalem, together in an upper room, praying and waiting for the Spirit to come. And on the Jewish festival day called Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came in power! Acts 2:4 says “and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.”

From that time on, the followers of Jesus were different! They *did* receive *power* – the “dynamite” of the Holy Spirit. Yes, they were still human. Prone to human error, weakness, and evil. The pages of the New Testament reveal an honest and realistic take on these early Christians. But they were *changed* once they received the power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost! They no longer hid behind closed doors out of fear. They boldly shared the good news about Jesus with anybody and everybody! They were infused with a divine Presence that enabled them to transcend their human weaknesses and limitations and do great things for God! *The Holy Spirit gave them new power for Christian living!*

How often in the Bible the Holy Spirit is associated with *power*. In the Old Testament, the Spirit of God would occasionally come on someone, and they were enabled to do extraordinary things – Samson fought a lion and tore it to bits. People would get the Spirit, and prophecy, or be equipped to lead armies in battle, or assume a position of leadership.

Jesus Himself was filled with the power of the Spirit. Luke 4:14 tells us, “And Jesus returned in the *power of the Spirit* into Galilee.” Acts 10:38 says God “anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with *power*”.

And now, since Pentecost, that power of the Holy Spirit is available to all! Ephesians 3:16 says, “I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with *power* through his *Spirit* in your inner being.”

“Stay in the city until you have been clothed with *power* from on high” (Luke 24:29). How much of the power of the Holy Spirit do you have in your life? I believe one of the greatest needs of Christians and the Church today is for a fresh outpouring of God’s power through the Holy Spirit.

For us as individuals. Do you at times struggle with a sense of powerlessness and inadequacy? I do! We know we should resist certain temptations, but we can't; we realize some of our attitudes need to be changed, but we're stuck in them; we want to forgive someone who's hurt us, but we can't let go of resentment; we ought to share our faith more than we do, but we're too timid and afraid; we wish we were more patient with people, but we're not. We need power!

The Church, too, struggles with lack of power and adequacy. Today we are witnessing the disintegration of traditional moral standards and values. And the Church seems unable to stem the tide (in fact, church people often are sucked in by these newest cultural trends and fads). Look at youth culture. For a number of years now, with each new generation of youth, fewer percent are embracing Christianity and the church, or even have any exposure to church. Kids get their cues for living from the culture, not the church. In every community, churches are surrounded by people without Christ and spiritually lost. And yet many churches are unable to connect with those who pass by the church day in and day out. It's like the church is invisible to them. We need power from on high!

2 Timothy 3:5 is a haunting verse of Scripture. It says one of the characteristics of the last days is that there will be people "having a form of godliness but denying its power" (2 Timothy 3:5). God talk is there. Religion is there. Church activities are there. But there is no power in it!

This reminds me of a car we once had. Back in the late 70's, when there was a gas shortage. People were trading in their big cars for small, fuel efficient cars. We had a big Oldsmobile station wagon. Traded it in on a little blue Datsun station wagon. We had 3 kids. Nancy and I would crowd the two of us and our 3 kids in that little Datsun. We'd be okay until it came to going up a hill. (We lived in the Pocono Mountains). The car would get slower and slower. It'd be embarrassing if anyone was behind us!

But Jesus promised, "You will receive *power* when the Holy Spirit comes on you" (Acts 1:8). The power of the Holy Spirit is available to us if we're followers of Jesus. Now we *receive* the Holy Spirit when we put our faith in Christ. Simon Peter's words on the day of Pentecost are for us: "Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). We *receive* the Holy Spirit as a gift when we receive Christ as our Savior. But being *filled* with the *power* of the Spirit is something more!

We're scheduled to have our house *power washed* this week. I've borrowed our son's power washer and done it several times. This year we're paying to have it done. You know what that's like. That intense, forceful stream of water that cleans the dirt off our homes or porches or sidewalks. Different from when we just use our garden hose to water the plants or lawn. Some of us experience the Holy Spirit like the normal use of the garden hose. He's there in our lives, but not really making a ton of difference in the way we live. But others are like the pressurized water - there's a force, an energy, where the Spirit fills us and lifts us to a higher plane of living.

Sam Shoemaker was an Episcopal priest who had a book on the Holy Spirit. He talked about

getting into the “stream of the Spirit” – where we are carried along by the Spirit’s energy and power. God wants us not just to *have the Spirit*, but for the Spirit *to have us*!

In a seminary missions class, Herbert Jackson told how, as a new missionary, he was assigned a car that would not start without a push. After pondering his problem, he devised a plan. He went to the school near his home, got permission to take some children out of class, and had them push his car off. As he made his rounds, he would either park on a hill or leave the engine running. He used this ingenious procedure for two years. Ill health forced the Jackson family to leave, and a new missionary came to that station. When Jackson proudly began to explain his arrangement for getting the car started, the new man began looking under the hood. Before the explanation was complete, the new missionary interrupted, “Why, Dr. Jackson, I believe the only trouble is this loose cable.” He gave the cable a twist, stepped into the car, pushed the switch, and to Jackson’s astonishment, the engine roared to life. For two years needless trouble had become routine. The power was there all the time. Only a loose connection kept Jackson from putting that power to work. We don’t have to try to live the Christian life in our own power. God wants us to have the fullness and power of His Spirit!

This fullness of the Spirit can happen *gradually, over time*, as we grow in the Lord. Sometimes it can happen *in a burst, in an instantaneous fresh outpouring of God’s Spirit on us*. It’s often referred to as being “baptized in the Spirit”, or “the second blessing”. Either way, whether the Spirit fills us gradually, over a period of time, or whether He comes in a particular experience we have of Him.

How can we tap into this vast supply of God’s power for living? First, *know that God earnestly wants to give you His power for Christian living*. When I got involved in the mission to the church in Kenya, one of the first things we did was pay to have the church wired for electricity. However, the Kenyan government held back on connecting the church to its power source. They were looking for us to pay them money – a bribe. Eric Wanga and the leaders in the church wouldn’t give in. They waited a year or two, and finally the government connected the church to the power source. The government had the power, but was reluctant to give it.

God is not like that! He *wants* to equip you and me with His Spirit and His power. Why wouldn’t He? That’s how the kingdom work gets done – by His Spirit! Jesus told us this plainly. “So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asked for a fish, would give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asked for an egg, would give a scorpion? If you, then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:9-13). Note: how much more will God give the Holy Spirit to those who ask!

And then, if we want the fullness of the Spirit, it’s important to *pray, pray, pray!* As I said at the beginning of this message, before Jesus ascended back to heaven, He told His followers to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the promised Holy Spirit. “Stay in the city until you have been clothed

with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). Jesus also told them, “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised” (Acts 1:4). They waited. And what did they do while they waited? Did they watch TV? Read the newspaper? Play board games? No – they *prayed*! Acts 1:14 says, “They all joined together constantly in prayer...”.

We’re in different situation today. The Holy Spirit has already been poured out on the Church. He came in fullness on the day of Pentecost. But prayer is still the channel that enables the Spirit’s power to connect with us. In the Book of Acts we read of instances where believers received the Holy Spirit as the apostles laid hands on them and prayed. For instance, in Acts 8, it says that the apostles in Jerusalem heard that people in Samaria had received God’s Word and become believers, so they sent Peter and John to them. “The two (Peter and John) went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit...then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8:15, 17).

We can pray for ourself and ask God to send the Spirit on us. We can pray for one another to receive the Spirit in His fullness. Throughout the years, as I’ve served different churches, I’ve preached about the Holy Spirit, and given an altar call, for people to come and receive the fullness of the Spirit. I’ve prayed, and laid my hands on them. And there have some very special moments, when the Holy Spirit has made Himself known. Even once we get a fresh burst of power from God, the Spirit’s life in us is nurtured by daily prayer, Bible study, Christian worship and fellowship, obedience to God’s commands. So, pray, pray, pray.....don’t just pray once and then give up!

When I was in high school and college, there was quite a movement of the Holy Spirit in this area and beyond, often called the “charismatic movement”. People were experiencing the Holy Spirit in remarkable ways. Some were being “baptized in the Spirit”, often speaking in tongues as part of the experience. Prayer meetings and worship services were being held where there was a joy and an energy and the gifts of the Spirit were being expressed (speaking in tongues, interpretation, prophesying, healing, miracles). A Saturday night service at a church in Upper Octarara would have hundreds of people from all over the world. It was an exciting time, and I pray that there will an outpouring of God’s Spirit once again – all over the world, in our country, in Lancaster County, and in this church! Why not? Just ask, Jesus said.

Some years ago in the Tournament of Roses Parade on New Year’s Day, one of the floats sputtered, and came to a stop. It held up the whole parade. The problem? It was out of gas! The irony was that the float was that of the Standard Oil Company! That company had vast resources of gasoline and power, and their float ran out of gas!

Our God has vast reserves of His Spirit and the power of His Spirit at our disposal. So, we can live victoriously, and get the gospel into the world. None of us have to be out of gas spiritually! Perhaps a quote from Jim Cymbala, long time pastor at the Brooklyn Tabernacle, is a good way to end this sermon. He said, "Without the Spirit of God, we're left to struggle with our self-effort, which is riddled by moral weakness and sinful tendencies. But when the Spirit comes, we have joy, hope, and power."

