

Sermon: Is something missing from your Christian life?

Reading: Acts 2:1-13

Introduction

Do you like puzzles? If you do I'm sure you have found yourself stuck many times when a clue, question or a number from the puzzle just confounds us and we can't progress any further because of this one missing piece.

I remember doing a 1000 piece jigsaw with my nan, when I was a lad. It took us all week to complete. Each evening after tea, we went into the parlour for an hour and slowly worked together, putting in piece after piece. The day arrived when we were putting in the final pieces and suddenly discovered, a piece was missing. We searched high and low, but it wasn't to be found. The picture always remained incomplete in my mind because of this one missing piece. How frustrating it is when we can't complete a puzzle, or progress any further when something is missing.

Today is Pentecost, Jesus promised us a precious gift which will help us in the Christian life. The question I'm pondering today is, 'Did we receive the Holy Spirit when we believed or is something missing from your faith?'

Context

Over the 40 days since Jesus burst forth from the tomb, conquering sin and death. He appeared to His disciples, numerous times and even convinced the doubter Thomas! Jesus appeared to more than 500 people who saw Him at the same time (**1 Cor 15**), possibly on the mount at His ascension. Even His half brother James, who was a skeptic, believed. James was more skeptical than a doubter but when Jesus revealed Himself to him he calls himself a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ (**James 1:1**). It's been 10 days since Jesus ascended, returning to the Heavenly Kingdom, taking up His place at the right hand of the Father on the throne.

As we consider Jesus ascension, we should take a moment to really consider what this actually means. Just like Jesus rose bodily from the tomb, (this was no spiritual resurrection), a literal, bodily resurrection. Jesus could be hugged, touched, He could eat and yet, He still bore the scars as a witness and testimony to His identity.

Many Christians seem to think the Ascension of Jesus means the undoing of the incarnation (becoming truly human, taking on flesh), but this is an enormous error. When Jesus became man, He did not cease to be God, and when Jesus ascended, He did not cease to be a man. Karl Barth once wrote, 'The Son of God, our humanity to all eternity. It is a clothing which He does not put off. It is His temple which He does not leave. It is the form which He does not lose' The dust of the earth, now sits on the eternal throne of heaven! This is a remarkable concept, Jesus is still the God/Man and that has enormous practical consequences for us for us. We will see God face to face, the very face of Jesus we will behold in glory.

Jesus promised after His ascension the gift would be given. The disciples must have been intrigued and puzzled what this meant. I imagine the disciples were quizzing Jesus and so John records what Jesus did, 'He breathed on them', or more likely, Jesus blew on them, this is what you will receive, the Spirit of God (**John 20:22**).

Since Jesus ascension, the disciples met continually in the temple in prayer and praising God. It was on the tenth day, The Holy Spirit makes His appearance in the house where all

the disciples were gathered, 'Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from Heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting' (**Luke 2:2**). Luke goes on to describe what looked like tongues of fire, which separated and came to rest on each one of them and then says, 'All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit' (**Luke 2:4**).

What difference does receiving the Holy Spirit make in the life of a Christian?

It's a good question, there are some who are not even aware of The Holy Spirit. This should not surprise us, after all how many sermons do we hear preached today on the identity, the power and the importance of the Holy Spirit? It seems when it comes to the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit is probably the most neglected and forgotten God in the church. St. Paul could spot when the Spirit was missing from a church or a believer, can you?

Consider when Paul arrived at Ephesus and he met about a dozen Christians there. The Scriptures recount the events this way, "There he found some disciples and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"

They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?"

"John's baptism," they replied.

Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after Him, that is, in Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied' (**Acts 19:1-6**).

Paul explained about the Holy Spirit and put this missing piece of their understanding right, for he knew a Christian without the Holy Spirit is like a car without an engine. It may look good on the outside, it may even have fancy wheels and new tyres, but without any power, it's going nowhere.

Paul's investigation revealed these Christians have heard in the gospel of salvation, confessed their sins, repented and were baptised in water, but they had not yet received the Holy Spirit.

Every Christian need to believe in the gospel, confess their sins, repent, trust in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour, be baptised and then receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit for their lives to be complete in Christ in order to live the life of Christ, otherwise we will live a life in the flesh and fail and be filled with discouragements without the supernatural work of God in our lives.

Paul said this, 'Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God' (**Rom 8:5-8**).

This is so important. If we have not the Spirit and maintain our life in the flesh, we will never be able to please God. A.W. Tower makes the point provocatively when he wrote these words, 'If the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the church today, 95 percent of what we do would go on and no one would know the difference! If the Holy Spirit had been withdrawn from the New Testament church, 95 percent of what they did would stop, and everybody would know the difference.' So much of what goes on in the church today is in our strength alone.

Crib and the Cross.

Imagine how frustrating it must have been for the Christians in Ephesus to have repented and believed but missed out on the wonderful gift, promised by Jesus. We all love to receive good gifts and this gift is the best gift any Christian could ever receive. So imagine going through your whole life, struggling, falling and many times being frustrated as a Christian only to discover right at the very end of our life, there was a gift waiting for us, that we never received! This can mean we end up stuck somewhere between the crib and the cross! The manger has become a central features of the Christmas nativity when we retell the events of the great Incarnation of Jesus. The manger was a rough structure constructed to feed the animals, never was this designed to be a bed for an infant, never was it intended for Christians to stay at the crib to worship. The end of Jesus life was marked again with a rough wooden structure. This purpose of the cross was to inflict the maximum amount of pain and humiliation on a person before death. The cross has become the emblem/sign connected with the Christian faith and like the crib, many Christians are stuck at the cross.

Like the Christians in Ephesus too many Christians have not completed the faith journey beyond the cross to enter into the Pentecost and received the Holy Spirit. If the church is to ever get back on the right path, she needs to confess her sins and neglect of her duties, repent and begin preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Repentance and Faith in Christ alone) and ask God for the Holy Spirit to lead us into truth.

Some people have never received the Holy Spirit, which is what Paul identified in Ephesus. When we read the book of Revelation Jesus tells John, the church of Ephesus once had a great love for Him. It seems once Paul had informed the church about this missing prize, how their love for Jesus increased. Sadly as what often happens as the next generation comes through church, they can also stall at the manger or get stuck at the crossing if they have never come into the baptism of the Holy Spirit and so their love grew cold. Jesus counselled the church to return to their first love and do the things they did at first. **(Rev 2:4-5)**.

Its worth noting here, it may even be that we as believers have received the Holy Spirit but our lifestyles have grieved the Spirit **(Eph 4:30)** or we have ignored His prompting so many times in our rebellion that we have quenched Him from out lives and churches **(1 Thess 5:19)** just as they did in Laodicea **(Rev 3)**.

Some may well ask, Isnt it enough to be Christened, attend church and do good things? Isn't that enough to be called a Christian? Some people seem to think so, but consider what Paul says here, 'You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of His Spirit who lives in you.....For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory' **(Rom 8:9-15)**.

Do we cry our Abba Father? This is how we know we are children of God. We are not automatically a child of God just because we are born, we only become His child by adoption when we receive the Spirit. Do you ever hear that preached?

Is the Holy Spirit just a force?

A big mistake many make when referring to the Holy Spirit is thinking it's simply the power of God, akin to an impersonal force. An impersonal force can be referred to as an 'it' but we must never say this of the Holy Spirit. The wind can have great power, but its impersonal. It has no memory, no imagination, it does not think, care or have a conscience, it blows, and cares not what anyone says about it. But a person has feelings, intelligence, insight, imagination and can be grieved. The Holy Spirit is not only a Person but the Third Person of the Holy Trinity- very God. The Holy Spirit is never referred to as she in Scripture but always as He. So we speak reverently of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit doesn't just follow us around like a puppy, but in fact the Holy Spirit dwells (Tabernacles) within us, lived in us and our bodies become His Holy Temple. Now that is mind blowing. Our bodies are His temple. This is why we have to be so careful what we do in the body. Most sins are committed outside of the body, but sexual immorality is committed in the body which links the Holy Spirit to our sexual sins and this grieves the Spirit. That's why sexual immorality is always mentioned as sin, regardless of what culture or progressives in the church say about it.

Consider these few passages if you need convincing of His Divinity. The Spirit was present at the creation, 'Hovering over the waters' (**Gen 1:2**)

The Holy Spirit is Omnipresent as the Psalmist reveals saying, 'Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; If I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you' (**Ps 139:7-8**).

When Annanias and Sapphira, sold a piece of land and they held back monies for themselves, Peter the Apostle confronts them saying, 'You have lied to the Holy Spirit' (**Acts 5:3**) and then goes on to say, 'You have not lied to man, but to God (**Acts 5:5**), declaring the Spirit as God.

When Jesus gave the great commission and told the disciples to baptise they were given instruction to baptise in the names of the Trinity, The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit (**Matt 28:19**).

How do we receive the Holy Spirit?

Some receive the Holy Spirit at the moment of conversion, which was my experience, but this is obviously not the case for everyone, as the Scriptures have already shown with the believers at Ephesus. They only received the Holy Spirit when Paul laid his hands upon them and prayed.

Luke provides us with the key to receiving the Holy Spirit and it's so simple. Jesus says, 'Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!' (**Luke 11:11-13**).

Have you noticed something in some believers which makes them different than everyone else around. Have you ever wondered, have I missed something when it comes to my faith? If so this question may be for you - Have you received the gift of the Holy Spirit? If you are unsure, then its probable you haven't, trust me you know when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and dwells within you. Ask God today, for your Pentecost.